NORFOLK PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 3878 00191602 2

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mrs. Minister

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/mrsminister0000unse

Mrs. Minister

by

OLIVE KNOX

Philadelphia

THE WESTMINSTER PRESS

COPYRIGHT, MCMLVI, BY OLIVE KNOX

All rights reserved – no part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review in magazine or newspaper.

Copyright, 1907, F. A. Mills. Renewed and assigned to Shawnee Press, Inc., Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 56–5248

C-9219

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

With Love to My Mother
Elsie Anne
and
In Memory of My Father
George David

Mrs. Minister

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

1

AT LAST Mother was going to be Mrs. Minister. She was twenty-nine and had six children, but that did not keep her feet from almost dancing at the thought as we stood on the station platform at Ottawa to board a train for the United States.

She looked at Grandma Robinson and smiled. Between the two of them they had made Father a minister, and, to celebrate, Grandma and Grandpa R were going as far as the Soo with us to visit Grandpa's brother.

We children, ranging from almost nine down to almost two, seeing that Mother's eyes weren't on us, scampered in all directions playing tag.

"Hey!" shouted a trainman as Mackay, my twin brother, almost tripped him. "Hey, Ma'am, you should tie these children from the orphanage together or you'll never get them back into custody."

"They're not from the orphanage," said Mother, the gold specks in her hazel eyes flashing. "They're mine."

The trainman pushed his cap to the back of his graying hair and gave Mother a wide grin. "Who would have thought it," he drawled, glancing at Grandma and Grandpa. "I

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

thought you were a youngster yourself, traveling with your parents."

This mollified Mother and her cheeks went rosy. She couldn't keep from putting a hand up to her heavy dark hair, which waved back from a wide forehead and was topped by a white sailor, trimmed with a bunch of red cherries, giving a touch of color to her high-necked white waist and the navy-blue suit that she was wearing. Neither did it stop her from lining us up in twos once again, so that we could enter the train like the animals going into Noah's ark.

First went Grandma and Grandpa. Mr. and Mrs. God, we thought, as Grandma was always reading her Bible and Grandfather had whiskers down over his vest like the Bible pictures – and his word was law.

Behind them went Florence in a blue cambric dress, and a rosebud-trimmed straw bonnet on her fair curls, which had been put up in rags the night before. She held Anne's hand. Anne was almost two, and also wore a blue dress. In her other hand Florence carried her doll, carefully protecting it as Father had promised us doll carriages if our dolls were in good condition.

Next in line was myself, Elsie, but called Brownie. I was the only brown-haired one among the towheads. I wore a new pink cambric dress and I too cuddled a doll as I clung to my twin's hand. We were half past six. John, age five, and Innis, turned four, followed; the latter, like my twin, being named after a minister, I suppose in the hopes that someday one of them would follow in the good men's steps. All the boys wore cotton suits of short pants and blouse jackets with little caps on their hair.

Behind us came Mother, one hand full of parcels, the other holding up her skirt so that she could climb the train steps.

Trains weren't anything new to us. We were always going some place or coming back with Father as he went to college or spent the summers preaching on mission fields as a student minister. After one of our train trips Mother dis-

covered that her cherubs were crawling with vermin. It was hopeless to get rid of them by the " pick one by one " method, so Mother had to throw away our underwear, which she could ill afford to do.

But we loved the trains: the shriek of the whistles, the clanging of bells, and the rushing of the wheels as they whispered over steel rails.

This time it was different too. Other times Mother never knew whether Father would be coming back to college or yield to the temptation of taking up a homestead on one of the mission fields.

" Why mightn't Papa come back? " I asked one time, overhearing Mamma and Grandma talking about it.

" Your papa is half minister and half farmer," Mother said, then a dreamy look came into her eyes. " All winter your father loves his studies and his supply preaching. But when spring comes and the sap surges back into the trees, he hears the call of the land. He changes and is happy only when he is working with growing things." Then she turned to Grandma. " Sometimes I'm frightened. I'm afraid he'll give up the ministry and go to farming in earnest." A tear shone on her black lashes.

I didn't see why she should think farming was bad enough to weep over. I liked Father better when he was on the farm. He was never too busy to go walking in the meadows or go swimming. He let us go barefooted too. In winter Father was more like a stranger. All week he was at college. In the evenings he studied or read his Greek Bible, and on Sundays he preached for ministers who were away or ill.

Grandma R shared Mother's hopes and efforts to make him a minister. Even before Father was born she dedicated him to the Church. She had attended a Methodist revival, and as she rode home on horseback she had felt Father move under her heart. Inspired by the service, she whispered a promise to God that this new child, her tenth of thirteen, would be given to him.

Then Father had just missed being born on Christmas Day. To Grandmother that was another sign that he was to follow in Christ's footsteps. But as Father grew up he wasn't so sure. He liked the farm, and when he was fourteen he stopped school. But the summer he was sixteen his right leg was crushed in a hay press. Gangrene set in, and his leg was cut off just below the knee.

"It is the will of God," said Grandma, reading her Bible.

It must have been, since Father went back to school. One Sunday he came home from church, still walking on crutches, for he had not yet gotten an artificial limb, and told Grandma that he was going to be a minister. And if he hadn't Mother would never have met him.

But meet him she did when he came to Fort Stewart to preach while their own minister was on holiday. A week before he came, Mother had slept with a piece of wedding cake under her pillow. That night she dreamed of a fair-haired young man limping toward a ladder that led up to the stars. When he reached it, he began to climb it.

According to an old superstition, that meant she would marry such a man, even though she had been going with a dark young man, also a student minister, named Noble Puffer.

Noble had written a poem about her called "Romance at Bat Lake," which she kept with Father's old letters. The poem tells about an adventure at the lake when Mother (Elsie), Aunt Lydia, Emma Puffer, Uncle Tom, and Noble were walking by the lake. Seeing a boat on the other side, the two men went to get it to row it back and take the girls for a ride. As they sang a *voyageur* song, the boat sprang a leak, and while Uncle Tom poled away, Noble bailed it with a tin can. The twelve-stanzaed poem ended,

"By dint of rapid movements they
Had brought their craft to shore.
And now how happy were the five,
Who met to part no more."

A few months later Noble was dead of virus pneumonia. When we learned about it, we were sorry for him, but thought how lucky it was that we weren't six little puffers, but six little Robins.

When Mother met Father, George David, she thought he was the man in her dreams; and when she saw that he limped, she was sure of it.

Father had no trouble falling in love with Mother. She was the prettiest girl in town, and one of a family of ten. But there was a snag. There wasn't a mortgage hanging over the old home or anything like that, but Father was setting out to be a Methodist minister – and Methodist students were forbidden to marry until they finished college.

What a waste of time, thought Mother and Father, as we six children proved! So they rebelled against the ruling. Why shouldn't they get married right away?

"Why not?" said Mother, thinking of her grandmother, who had been presented to Queen Victoria, and had turned down a wealthy suitor to elope with a British soldier and flee to Canada. If her English grandmother could elope, so could she.

So Mother and Father slipped away and got married, and Father took her to his sister's farm for a honeymoon.

"We told Aunt Jane we were going to keep it a secret," Mother told us years later. "We wouldn't have any children for a few years, and George David would be able to finish college."

Aunt Jane took her too literally and was going to put them in separate bedrooms; but Father didn't see it that way. So they had their honeymoon, then Mother went back to college with Father. They didn't keep their secret long. One night a woman across the street saw Father's and Mother's shadows on the window blind of the student minister's bedroom, and started gossip. It came to Father's ears.

Indignantly he strode across the street carrying their wedding certificate to clear Mother's name. Now their secret

was out, and Mother wept, thinking that she had ruined Father's chance to be a minister.

"If the Church Board objects, I'll become a Presbyterian," said Father, comforting her.

The Board did object, though it was inclined to be lenient. But by this time Father's Irish was all set on being a Presbyterian minister. This meant more years of studying, but what was that when they were so young, Mamma being almost twenty-one and Father twenty-two? If Mother had realized that for years she would be just a part-time wife, often having to stay with the children in one of Grandpa LeBeau's houses, or living in one or two rooms, while Father finished his course at Queen's University, then two terms in Chicago at McCormick Seminary, where he was ordained, she might not have been so happy.

But that was past, and now we were on the train to take us to Father, and a real home for Mother – a manse. Father would meet us in Minneapolis and take us to Lead, the gold-mining city in South Dakota. Since his ordination he had been preaching there, trying to get enough money to send for us. Soon we should be there too, and Mother would be Mrs. Minister, and we should be the minister's children.

We children weren't so sure that we liked that idea. Mother wanted to be Mrs. Minister. Father was Mr. Minister, whether he wanted to be or not; but we hadn't asked to be minister's children, and we'd had one fight over it already.

We'd run wild all of July on Grandpa R's farm with its chickens, ducks, calves, colts, and pigs, to say nothing about kittens and pups. On rainy days we'd played in the old bee-house, which had an attic full of wax that we used for chewing gum, and Grandma used to clean her irons.

One day Mackay got stung by a bee, and we grew wide-eyed as his cheek got fatter and fatter and his eye closed. We would gladly have taken the sting in order to boast a cheek that got the attention of adults and children.

But our fight was with our cousin Lloyd, who was about

the same age as we twins. He lived on the adjoining farm. We went there along a path, past a small, round lake fed by springs. We picked daisies in the meadow, making chains and crowns of them, and pulled off the petals saying, "He loves me, he loves me not," the way we'd seen the older girls do.

When Lloyd heard we were going to the States to be with Father, he taunted us. "You'll be the minister's kids then," he said, grinning nastily, "and you'll have to be good and have no fun."

"We will not," we retorted.

"You will so. And you'll be Yankees too!"

That was too much for us. We didn't know what being a Yankee meant, but we didn't like the way he said it. We chased him and caught up with him beside the *sinking* spring, which we always crossed carefully on a wide plank. We'd been warned against it, and told that if we fell in we'd sink out of sight in the boiling sand.

"We will not be minister's kids," shouted Mackay.

"And we won't be Yankees either," I cried.

John and Innis, their faces dirty, as they'd been pretending they were pigs rooting up tender roots, added their protests.

"We're going to be pigs, not Yankees," John said.

"Me a pig too," said Innis.

"You will so be Yankees," mocked Lloyd.

But we twins had our hands on him by then and we pushed him into the spring. He hollered, but we wouldn't let him come out, not until he ate his words. Fascinated, we watched the sand bubble up around his ankles, then up his legs to his knees.

"Say we won't be minister's kids or Yankees," we twins commanded, "or we'll leave you here forever."

"I will not," retorted Lloyd. "And you'll be Yankees too. My paw said so."

The sand was well up past his knees and he was waving

his arms and shivering. His peaked face was white and his freckles stood out like specks on a turkey's egg. Florence, who had been minding Anne while Mother washed her hair, came running down the path and saw Lloyd.

"Let him out," she pleaded, her big blue eyes frightened.

"Not until he takes back his words," said Mackay, and I echoed him.

"I'll tell Grandpa," she said, and before we could tell her what Lloyd had called us, she raced up the path.

"Take it back, and we'll pull you out," said Mackay.

"Won't," cried Lloyd, as stubborn as my twin, and, grinning, pointed at the house.

Mother, her hair hanging almost to her knees, was coming out the back door, with Grandpa and Florence following her. We took one more look at Lloyd, promising ourselves that we'd get even another time, then we took to our heels and watched from the shelter of the trees as Grandpa pulled Lloyd out of the spring.

That night we twins were put to bed with only a bowl of bread and milk for our supper.

"I'm not going to be a minister's kid," I said, after Mother heard our prayers.

"And I'm not going to be a Yankee," said Mackay.

"Hush," said Mother, saying something vague about Yankees, and, as to being minister's kids, she said a kid was a baby goat, and after all we knew we weren't goats.

That mollified us for the time being and next day we were friends with Lloyd and rode with him on a load of hay.

"There's Indians and cowboys and train robbers where you're going, Paw says," he told us, and before we left he gave Mackay his toy pistol.

Sitting in the train, Mackay and I opposite Grandma and Grandpa, Mackay clutched the pistol in his hand and pressed his face against the window, hoping to catch a glimpse of a scalping Indian or train robbers. I watched too for a while, but all I saw was small fields enclosed with root or rail fences;

cows sleeping under trees; and horses racing about.

So I leaned on the arm of my seat and listened to Mother reading about Epaminondas, a little Negro boy. Mother had Anne on her knee. Florence sat beside her, her yellow curls falling about her face as she leaned over to look at the pictures. John and Innis were perched on the back of their seat, pretending they were chickens on a roost.

I had heard the story about the little Negro boy, who did everything wrong, so often that I knew it by heart, so I watched Grandpa falling asleep. Grandma was sitting with her hands folded on her lap, her eyes closed and her black bonnet, edged with white, sitting on her still dark hair. But Grandpa's head was nodding and his sandy beard, streaked with white, was spread out on his chest. Every once in a while he'd give a little puffing noise and part of his beard would lift up as if a breeze had blown it, like the day he had been cross at Mackay.

Remembering, I squirmed and peeked at him between my lashes, as if even looking too hard would wake him up and he would be angry like he was the day Mother and Grandmother went visiting and left us in his care.

Mackay was throwing pebbles from the lake shore and had hit Florence on the forehead. She told him to stop, but he kept on, so I ran to Grandpa and tattled. Grandpa came back with me, and when Mackay saw him coming, he climbed a tree.

"Come on down, Mackay," said Grandpa, picking a switch.

But Mackay, his thin face scared-looking, shook his head.

Grandpa sat down beneath the tree to wait. He looked so cross behind his curtain of whiskers that I was sorry that I'd been a tattletale. Mackay climbed higher and higher and peered through the branches like a coon. He thought if he'd stay there long enough Mother would come home and save him from the wrath of Grandpa.

Finally Grandpa decided to hasten affairs. He went to the

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

shed and I followed. When I saw him taking down the ladder I ran back and told Mackay. He scrambled down the tree like a squirrel and raced for the hayloft.

Florence, sorry for Mackay now too in spite of the lump on her forehead, tried to help him. "It doesn't hurt now, Grandpa," she said.

But Grandpa wasn't one to stop what he had started. He soon had Mackay out of the loft and he used the switch on his bare legs.

"Spare the rod and spoil the child," said Grandpa, when Mother said she wished he'd waited until she got home. "And throwing stones is dangerous. He might have put Florence's eyes out."

Florence's blue eyes were so much like Father's, as was her hair, that Grandpa was partial to her. But that was the only time he had ever used a switch on us, and Mother said no more.

I tired of watching Grandpa's beard. I smoothed my pink dress, looked down my black stocking to the toe of my shiny slipper. Mother was still reading about the little Negro boy, who was now trying to remember what his mammy had told him to do with the six pies she had set on the steps to cool. And just then the Negro porter came down the aisle. He grinned at my wide-eyed stare, and went on.

It was the first train I'd been on that had a Negro porter. I slid out of my seat and followed him to a little room at the end of the car, where he sat down beside a table with some papers on it.

"Well, honey chile, what can I do for you?" he asked, his teeth looking very white as he smiled at me standing in the doorway.

"Are you Mr. Epaminondas?" I asked.

"No, I'm Mr. White – Sam White," he said, drawing his hand from his pocket.

I thought he was fooling as he was certainly black. "Did you get black in the hot sun like burnt cookies in an oven?" I asked.

He opened his mouth and laughed, and his tongue was as pink as my own. "No, honey chile, I was born black," he said, and tossed up something white that he held in his hand.

I sat down opposite him and began to chatter like a magpie. I told him all about Mother going to be Mrs. Minister and what Lloyd had said about us being minister's kids and Yankees; also about the Indians, cowboys, and train robbers.

"Don't you worry about such things," said Sam, and tossed two white cubes with blacks dots on them on the table.

"Are they dominoes?" I asked, though they weren't the shape of our black dominoes that had white dots on them.

"Sort of," said Sam grinning. "It's a game too."

"Let's play it," I said eagerly.

Sam hesitated, then grinned. He picked up the two cubes, cupped them in his hands, shook them between his knees, then above his head, all the time making funny faces and talking softly to himself.

"Come on, Baby, come to Papa. Come on, my sweet darlings, roll Papa a seven."

Then he tossed them on the table. His white teeth gleamed when he turned up a four and a three, but he scowled when he got two ones.

"Let me do it," I begged.

He handed me the cubes. I shook them like he did. "Come on, Baby. Come on, my sweet darlings, roll Papa a seven," I mimicked, and dropped them on the table.

"A five and a two," said Sam in a hoarse whisper. "You're a natural, honey chile."

I didn't know what that meant, but I liked the sound of his voice when he said it. And we went on playing until Sam had to make the round of the cars again.

"Can I play with them while you're away?" I asked; then, as he hesitated, I added, "Please," though please was one of my *not like* words. And all because one of my aunt's beaux would insist that I say please, holding a piece of candy just out of my reach. Unless I terribly wanted the candy I would go without it rather than be made to say please. But Sam was

different. He wasn't making me say please. I just thought it might be a good idea.

"Sure you can play with them," said Sam, "but don't lose them. They're the icing for the cake I earn."

That didn't mean anything to me, but after playing with them for a while, I went back to Mother. Excitedly I told her about Sam's game, and showed her the cubes.

"Dice!" she cried, and her face got funny, as I went through the pantomime that Sam did, and turned up a seven.

"Sam says I'm a natural," I boasted.

Mother's face went red. She looked as if she might either laugh or cry. "Heaven forbid!" she exclaimed.

I'd never heard Mother say "heaven" like that before. She had told me not to once. But I could never see why anyone shouldn't say hell, God, heaven, or the devil in conversations, because they were all in the Bible, and even Mr. and Mrs. God read that.

Anyway Mother said Sam had been teaching me a gambling game and I mustn't play it any more because gambling was a sin. I tried to tell Mother it wasn't, but she looked at Grandma and Grandpa, who were still sleeping, and shushed me up.

"Don't you want to go to heaven?" she asked.

I hesitated to say yes. I'd been given many pictures of heaven with white-robed angels playing harps and singing songs. But I had also seen exciting pictures of hell filled with demons wearing horns and spear-shaped, lashing tails as they hopped over red hot coals getting into mischief.

I didn't particularly like the idea of growing a tail and horns, but I couldn't sing or play a harp, so I didn't see that I'd have much fun in heaven. I thought of telling Mother that I'd like to see a bit of both, but something in her eyes held me back.

"Yes, I want to go to heaven," I said, deciding that it would be better to choose it for now at least.

Mother looked at me as if she knew what I was thinking.

"Then take those – those things – back to the porter," she said, "and tell him that you can't play with him any more."

I did that. But next day when Mother got trainsick it was Sam who brought her a cup of hot water. She drank it and it wasn't long until she felt better. Later she told Father, "I could have sworn there was brandy in it." And there must have been, because sometimes Mother had to take brandy medicine because of her heart condition and it sure put her to sleep.

But when I came back she was singing "Annie Laurie" very softly to Anne, who was lying with her golden curls against Mother's breast.

"Annie Laurie" was my other Grandpa's favorite song, and he would look at Grandma, sitting in her cretonne barrel chair, below a picture of Queen Victoria (though her son was now king) while Mother sang it. Though Mother's grandma had eloped with a British soldier, he had died and she had married an Irish soldier, who was our great-grandfather. And their daughter had married Grandpa LeBeau.

In spite of his French name he was mostly Irish too. But somewhere there must have been a French ancestor, because Grandpa looked like one. He was on the short side and had a pointed beard the color of a silver fox. He lived in a big house in Fort Stewart and had another little house where Mother lived the winter we twins were born.

I've heard about my arrival so often that even then I thought I could remember it all. I could see myself as a tiny, red-faced baby being carried back and forth by my bearded grandpa while my slightly crippled grandma warmed my old-fashioned bottle, with its glass tubing, over a lamp; then put in a few drops of paregoric to send me off to sleep.

I was the baby that hadn't been expected. On my arrival, two hours after Mackay, I was blue and spent my first day in a brandy bath. Then my twin gave himself a rupture so that he could have the daily supply of natural milk, and I went down the hill to Grandpa's until Mother was strong

enough to take care of a sixteen-months-old daughter, a crying son, and me.

The paregoric sent me home sooner than I was expected. My constitution responded to brandy baths, but it did not take kindly to sleeping drugs. I sprouted pimples, millions of them. Many times had I heard Mother say, "Six weeks after Brownie got the breast again, she was the most beautiful pink and white baby you ever saw."

I'm sure I gurgled with delight to think that I had put one over my twin, who henceforth had to be satisfied with one breast. And no doubt he learned early in life that it is impossible to put it over the feminine sex for long.

In spite of my return to Mother, Grandpa LeBeau always called me his baby, and he carried peppermints in his vest pocket for me. To get one I had to go through a ritual. Putting the peppermint between his teeth, he would wait for me to crawl up on his knee, put my hands on his shoulder, and my face against his. As his whiskers tickled me, I would grasp the peppermint between my teeth and hold on tightly while he tried to pull away. Finally I would have it and I would draw back from his beaming face with the peppermint in my mouth. Sometimes I would rest in his arms and enjoy the sweet. Other times he would toss me to his shoulder and we would go off to his big machine shop where he and Uncle Tom repaired machinery, and shod horses.

Thinking about him on the train I knew exactly what he would be doing. His short figure would be covered with a leather apron, and his gray eyes, like mine, would be twinkling as he whistled a merry tune. Or perhaps he would be trimming the hoof of a horse, and singing while the other grandchildren watched:

> "Shoe the horse, shoe the mare,
> But let the little colt go bare."

Then he would go to the forge to work the bellows. With an iron tong he would hold a horseshoe into a bed of red

coals that winked and blinked. There would be a swishing of the air, the crackle of hot coals, the smell of smoke, and the rhythmic beat of the hammer as he pounded the shoe into shape on the anvil. And sparks would rise in the air, sprout wings, and float away to fairyland. Then Grandpa would plunge the horseshoe into a tank of cold water. There would be a sizzling noise, and steam rising up like white clouds, half hiding Grandpa.

Then he would appear and start to recite "Under a Spreading Chestnut Tree." From an early age I knew Grandpa was the village smithy in that poem, and that his beautiful daughter singing in the village choir was Mother, singing as she was now on the train.

Just as she finished "Annie Laurie," a dumpling-shaped man wearing a black-and-white-checked vest, and pushing back a black, stiff hat on his oily black hair, came down the aisle, carrying a guitar.

"Can you sing 'Red Wing,' Lady?" he asked.

I looked at Mother. She had told us not to talk to strangers, and there she was smiling at him and saying, "I think so."

"Then sing it, Lady, and I'll play it."

He put his foot on the arm of Grandpa's seat, and began to strum the guitar. Mother started to sing:

> "There once lived an Indian maid,
> A shy little prairie maid, . . ."

When she got to the chorus:

> "Now, the moon shines tonight on pretty Red Wing,
> The breeze is sighing, the night bird's crying, . . ."

several voices were singing and one fellow got out in the aisle and danced the two-step pretending he had a partner in his arms.

Then Grandpa wakened up. He sat up straight, turned to the dumpling man, and gave him a cold look out of his very blue eyes.

"Take your foot off my seat, Sir, and that contraption away

from my ear," he said sharply; then his eyes almost popped out of his head as he saw the fellow dancing in the aisle. He turned to Mother.

" Elsie! " he said, and the one word was full of disapproval. " Are you, a minister's wife, singing a dancing song? "

Mother stopped singing and her cheeks went pink. As a girl she had danced at home and in the houses of her friends. She had been enjoying the music and had felt in the dancing mood herself because soon she would be seeing Father. But Grandpa's voice reminded her that now she was more than a wife; she was Mrs. Minister, and she should not encourage such frivolity.

" I'm sorry, Father Robinson," she said, but she didn't look sorry, just sober for a few minutes.

Still that night, putting us to bed, it wasn't " Red Wing " that she sang but " Away in a Manger." If she began to have doubts about the joy of being Mrs. Minister, she didn't mention them to us.

Neither did we realize that she might have a feeling of going into exile and would many times weep with longing to see her own relatives. But after all that was part of being a minister's wife. Even we knew that Jesus told his ministers to, " Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

2

WE SAID good-by to Grandma and Grandpa at the Soo. Mother wept, perhaps not only for parting from Papa's parents but because she was going into an unknown land. If she had known that World War I was looming on the horizon, she might have wept more.

Crossing a border didn't mean anything to us and all our life we had been going places. But we wept too. If we were going to be Yankees we didn't know if we should ever see Mr. and Mrs. God again.

When we crossed into the States we missed the neat little farms with their snake fences. Now there were only miles of trees and lakes. No matter how hard we looked there wasn't a sign of a naked Indian, not even one wearing skin clothes or feathered headbands.

Tiring of the same scenery, we began to pester Mother to tell us about Father. Of course we older ones remembered him, though we'd seen him only once since the September when Anne was born. Innis and John were very vague about him.

The last time he had been home Innis wakened in the morning to see Father in bed with him and Mother. He

crawled over Mother and jumped on Father's chest and began to slap his face.

"Go away, bad man," he cried, and it took a bit of explaining to convince him that Father had as much right there as he had, if not more.

Father's going to the States hadn't been an idea of a moment. In one of his first letters to Mother after they were married he said: "I am thinking seriously of going to the States this fall."

Father was very precise too, especially about the use of English – as we learned in the next few years. We had to say, "It is I," never, "It is me." Also we must say, "May I do this or that?" never, "Can I?" And dogs were "he" and cats "she."

He was even precise in his love letters to Mother. He always began them, "Dear Elsie," and once explained why. "I do not address you, 'My dearest Elsie,' for I have no other, so I address you as 'My dear Elsie.' If I called you, 'My dearest Elsie,' I should be intimating that you were only *one* of the many who are dear to me; but you are the only one who is dear to me in that sense, so I call you, 'My dear Elsie.'"

His reason should have pleased Mother even if she wished that he would call her his dearest, and she still treasures those first letters, which are now yellow with age.

But we children were not aware of the letters then. We wanted Mother to tell us about the time Father shot a bear. We had heard about it so often that we older ones felt that we could remember it. We often looked at the picture of Father, wrapped in furs, sitting in a cutter before a log cabin surrounded by trees on the shore of Sylvan Lake. That was when he was on a mission field in Alberta – and one of the times that he caught the spring fever and stayed to homestead, to preach, and to write his examinations extramurally – until Mother got him back to college.

There were bears there, and Father had already shot a

cinnamon bear. He used to sing a song to us that ended with the man up the tree saying, "Oh, Lawd, if you don't help me, please don't help that bear."

But it was another bear we wanted to hear about. At the time Florence was four, we twins three, and John had been born the September previous. At his birth one of the pioneer wives came to help Mother. But the baby refused to come and finally the midwife decided it was the fault of the bed's sagging springs. So she looked around for something to hasten the baby's birth and saw Father's Greek Bible. She took it from the shelf and put it under Mother's back. With its aid the baby arrived and was called John. And why not? He was the fourth child in our family and John was the fourth book in Father's Greek Testament.

With four children — all really babies — a milk supply was important, and Father had bought a cow "on time." Bess, we called her and she still wasn't paid for and our parents were afraid bears might get her. In July there had been a bear roaming around attacking cattle, sheep, and pigs. So Father decided to keep his gun loaded and ready, so that if he heard a bear bothering Bess he would be prepared.

At dawn one morning we wakened to hear Father jumping out of bed. There were noises outside.

"It's the bear," Mother said in a hoarse whisper.

Father already had his gun. He opened the door, steadied himself against the doorjamb, and peered out into the predawn darkness.

"Do you see him?" asked Mother.

"Yes," said Father, pointing his gun at a large, black shadow.

Mother was at his side now. "Are you sure, George David?" she asked.

"Of course . . . see him moving." And then his gun went off with a bang. The black shadow wavered, then dropped to the ground.

Mother lighted the oil lamp and Father pulled on his

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

clothes, and so did we children. "I'll have to bleed and skin him," he said, "and we'll have bear steaks for supper, and a rug for the floor." He lighted a lantern and went outside.

We were at his heels. "Don't get too close, children," said Mother.

Father laughed. "He hasn't moved. He's dead as a doornail," he said striding to the darker spot on the ground.

Then we heard him say, "Good Lord!" but it wasn't like he said it in prayers.

"George, what is it?" cried Mother; then she was at his side. She put her hand to her mouth and said hoarsely, "Oh, no — not the cow."

Then we were beside them looking down, not at a bear but at our Bess. "She's dead," said Mother, and began to cry.

"Poor, poor Bess," said Florence, patting her red hide, "she's sick."

Father rubbed his hand across his eyes, then straightened his shoulders and gave a hollow laugh. "Yes, Bess was the bear," he said, and shone the lantern on her head, and pointed at a hole right between her eyes. "But I sure got her in one shot."

His voice sort of broke like, and with that bit of philosophizing, which showed him a good shot though it didn't bring Bess back, we lost our milk supply. Father had to buy another cow — on time.

There were other stories about that Sylvan Lake homestead that we wanted Mother to tell us again — such as the time we twins got lost in the woods. All the neighbors were out on horseback looking for us, and Mother was frantic for fear we'd made a couple of bites for a cinnamon bear. Then we calmly came home all by ourselves, and my pinny was filled with rabbit droppings that I declared were berries, though I wouldn't eat one when Mother suggested I do so. Guess I'd already tried them.

Then there was the forest fire when Mother was terrified and tried to get us four away from it. She would carry baby

John a few yards, put him on the ground, then hurry back to shoo us ahead until we finally reached a neighbor's log cabin. But Mother didn't want to talk about these things. She hushed us up.

"That's all over," she said. "We'll be living in towns now and be safe."

She looked happy, but I wasn't. Living in towns seemed a dull prospect after all the exciting things that had happened to us so far.

Then Mother got sick, her face getting a greenish look, and she rushed away to the "Ladies' Room." When she came back she was as white as paper and lay down on the seat. Other people on the train offered advice, took us children to their seats, and then Sam came along with a pillow, and the drink of hot water — plus. Mother drank it and went to sleep.

While she was sleeping, Mackay and I sat with the man who played the guitar and he told us funny stories. Then he asked Mackay a question.

"What makes more noise than a pig going under a low board fence?" he asked.

Mackay, who was early recognized as the brain of the twins, puckered up his brow, but he couldn't get the answer.

"Two pigs," said the man, and chuckled. Then, seeing Mackay's downcast face, he said, "Now you try it on the others."

Mackay went down the aisle trying it out and was delighted when he discovered that he wasn't the only one who didn't get the right answer.

I went to look at Mother. She was still sleeping and I rubbed her forehead like I always did if she had a headache. A woman with teeth that stuck out in front told me to let Mother sleep and come and sit with her. I didn't want to.

People with buck teeth made me curl up inside and all because one day I had come into our house and seen my pretty Aunt Sadie wearing Mother's new false teeth over

her own. They were both laughing, though at the time I wasn't sure it was mirth, as tears rolled down their pink cheeks. They thought it was funny, but I thought my pretty aunt looked horrible and I cried.

It had been only a short time before that I realized that Mother had false teeth. I asked my Uncle Tom why, and he said it was because she had given all her teeth to us children. She must have had a lot of them, I thought, to give six children each a full mouth of teeth. I also decided that we couldn't have any more children when she didn't have any more teeth.

So I guess I wasn't very polite to the buck-toothed lady who was being kind to me. After staring at her for some time, I finally blurted, "Whose teeth are you wearing over yours?"

After that she let me go back to Mother, who wakened and said she wasn't sick any more.

The next day we crossed the Mississippi River and arrived in Minneapolis. There was a bit of confusion getting us ready to leave the train. Mother brushed all our curls and Sam helped us find our bonnets, caps, and parcels.

"You still look peeked, Ma'am," Sam said to Mother. "Perhaps I should fix you another hot drink before you leave."

Mother's face went pink. "Thank you," she said, and smiled. "But I'm feeling fine. Just a bit tired."

"Sure hope your husband is at the station to meet you, Ma'am," he said. "You've a mighty lively bunch of children to look after."

"He'll be there," said Mother, and now her cheeks were really pink, and her eyes were shining like stars.

But Mother was wrong. Father was not on the platform waiting to greet us; neither was he in the station. Mother left Florence with Anne, John, and Innis, and, after a speculative glance at us twins, took us along with her to look for Father. We didn't find him in the waiting room, nor outside on the platform when we took another look. Then we went

to the information wicket and asked about the trains from Lead.

" Yes, Ma'am, the train from Lead came in this morning," said the man peering out from behind iron bars.

Mother looked worried and her hands tightened on the wicket shelf. " My husband was to meet me here," she said.

The man put up a hand and scratched his thinning hair. " You came on the Soo train? " he asked.

" Yes," said Mother, " and I've six children with me."

" Well, now, don't worry, Ma'am. Perhaps your husband went for a walk and will be along later. You'd better go upstairs to the Ladies' Waiting Room and rest."

" If he inquires here, you'll tell him where we are? " asked Mother.

" Sure, sure," said the man, and took a big gold watch out of his vest pocket, looked at it, then put it up to his ear and shook it.

So Mother took our hands again, and we got the others and marched up a long stairway to the Ladies' Waiting Room, with its washrooms and long benches. But if Mother left it once to look for Father, she left it a dozen times. She didn't find him.

" Perhaps he'll be on tomorrow's train," said the wicket man, a different one this time.

So when night came we curled up on the waiting room benches and went to sleep. It was early morning when we wakened. Mother was still dozing, for she had been awake most of the night. But there was a man sitting at the end of her bench, near her feet.

It must be Father, I decided, though he had certainly changed, being smaller, thinner, and his hat was pulled down over his right eye, but his hair was like Father's — something like sun-bleached corn tassels.

Florence and Anne were asleep too, so we twins and Innis and John studied him. Suddenly Innis waddled across to him.

" Papa, Papa," he said, and tried to climb his knee.

The man started to get up, then sat down again and helped Innis to his knee with one hand, the other drawn up in his sleeve. We joined them. We twins were sure he wasn't Papa, now that we had a good look at him, but we weren't shy. We were used to strange people.

"Have you got any children?" I asked.

"Sure, I have," he said in a husky voice, smiling.

"Boys or girls?" I asked.

"Some of each," he said, then his whole face sort of smiled, and he looked us all over. "Three of each," he added.

"Just like us," I said.

"Yes, exactly like you."

"You – you're not Papa – are you?" I asked, wondering if maybe I had really forgotten him, and just then two men in uniform came through the door and walked by our bench, giving us a brief glance.

"Let's pretend I am," the man said funny-like, looking at the policemen.

Mackay studied him under lowering brows. "I won't pretend," he said, "but what makes more noise than a pig going under a low board fence?"

"A riddle maker, eh?' said the man.

"I'm not," said Mackay. "I'm a twin."

This brought a smile to the man's eyes. "I see," he said, then mumbled, "A pig going under – "

"Give up?" asked Mackay.

The man shrugged. "Yes. What's the answer?"

"Two pigs," said Mackay, and started to laugh. It wakened Florence, and Mother stirred but did not open her eyes. Florence came over to the man, rubbed her eyes, and smiled at him. Then suddenly her blue eyes opened wide.

"Oh – oh!" she cried, just as the policemen passed our bench again.

"What's the matter?" the man whispered hoarsely.

"You poor, poor man! You hurt your hand," she cried, pointing. "It's bleeding. I'll tell Mother. She'll fix it."

The man reached out a hand to stop her flight, but she eluded him, and we noticed that the hand he held up his sleeve had blood on it. Then everything happened at once. Mother was at our side, hastily snatching Innis from the man.

"Who are you?" she cried.

"Papa," chirped Innis.

The policemen were coming back, and the man jumped up and tried to get past us. But we had him hemmed in and the policemen stopped beside us.

"Is this man your husband, Ma'am?" one asked, looking at Mother.

"Papa, Papa," cried Innis, waving his arms to get back to the man, and the policeman started to turn away.

"I've never seen him before in my life," said Mother, and the policeman turned back, and she explained who she was, where we were going, and why we had slept in the waiting room.

The strange man tried to dart past us, but the policeman grabbed Innis' papa. He struggled and Florence was crying.

"Poor man, poor man! He's hurt, Mamma. Fix his poor hand."

"Are you hurt?" asked Mother, putting Innis down, and stepping up to him.

The man stopped struggling, gave Florence a gentle look, then turned to Mother. "Never mind, Ma'am," he said. "Forgive me for upsetting your little family. I didn't mean any harm. I was just sitting here for a few minutes to give me time to think about giving myself up."

Mother looked troubled. "What did you do?" she asked.

The policeman answered for him. "He's wanted for murder, Ma'am," he said. "Killed his wife."

Mother put her hand up to her mouth. "Oh, no," she said, motioning us close to her like a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings, "you didn't do that!"

The man shrugged.

" Come on," said the policeman, and one of them slipped handcuffs over his wrist.

Mother stood rigid, watching them walk to the doorway, but Mackay and I ran after them. The man looked back once, grinned at Mackay, and said, " I'll remember, Son, two pigs."

Then he was gone and we went back to Mother. " Now we'll forget all about him," said Mother, wiping tears from Florence's cheeks. " Today we'll find Papa."

I never forgot him and Mother wasn't allowed to either. Later, when we reached Lead, the newspaper had the story: *Murderer takes refuge with minister's wife: poses as her husband, and father of her six children.* Then it told about the man stabbing his wife because of another man, and they didn't have any children even though the man had told us he had. His wife didn't like children. Of course that made her a bad woman to us, and we still felt sorry for the man.

After several more trips down the stairs and several up again, with Mother looking more upset each time, we found Father. We twins were with her and had just started down the stairs again. There was a surging mass of people below us and suddenly Mother let go of our hands. Pointing at a man with a straw hat who was almost at the door, she let out a scream.

" George! George David! " she cried, and ran down the steps, saying his name over and over again.

For a half minute we watched, then we saw her catch up to the tall man with the straw hat, throw her arms around his neck, and hang on. We thought we'd better help her hold him so we dashed down the stairs, dodged past pant legs and long skirts. Mackay grabbed one of Papa's legs and I the other, and held on, while a crowd gathered around us.

" Papa, Papa, don't go away," we cried. " Don't leave us."

Mother, laughing shakily, let go of Father, and stepped back. We looked way up to Father's face. It was very red and his hat had fallen over one eye. But he was smiling and

his other eye was laughing. He put his hands on our heads.

"Release me," he said. "I'm not going to run away."

I didn't know what "release" meant, but if he wasn't going to run away, there was no need to hang onto his leg, so I let go and reached up my arms. But before I could even say hello and tell him my doll wasn't broken, Mackay spoke.

"What makes more noise going under a low board fence than a pig, Papa?" he asked.

Papa was lifting me up to kiss me, but he paused and said, "Two pigs, Son!"

He was smart, I knew. I gave him a hug as well as a kiss and Mackay too seemed pleased that Father knew the answer, and chattered about the man the police took away as we went upstairs to collect the other children.

I couldn't keep from looking at Father. I thought he was the best-looking man I had ever seen. He was almost six feet tall and, being so fair and slim, he looked very young. Mother was almost five feet and a half, but she came up only to the bottom of his ear. Together they looked fine, and I was glad that no one could be better-looking than our parents, even if they had made us the minister's children.

After Father had taken us to a hotel to eat, he explained that he had met the wrong trains and had been back several times to the station looking for us. But, not having much experience as a father, he had not thought to look for a Ladies' Waiting Room, and when he inquired at the wicket the men had changed, and he didn't even learn that Mother had been looking for him. Then he asked about Grandma and Grandpa and the farm. We told him plenty, all about the calves, colts, pigs, chickens, ducks, and turkeys.

"And how do the baby animals eat?" Papa asked John, who was trying to get a word in.

John told him about the pigs and calves nursing from their mothers like real babies, then about the chickens pecking at food on the ground as their mothers scratched it up.

"And how about the little colts?" asked Father.

Before John could answer, Innis, who had been listening, his round cheeks rosy with excitement, blurted out, " I know — the mamma horse goes around the barnyard kicking up worms."

We all laughed, and Father so hard that his face got as red as our flag. Mother said, " Shush, everyone is looking at us."

Florence looked at Innis' lips, which were pouting, ready to cry, and changed the subject. " Papa," she said, " every time John ate a boiled egg he looked in it for a baby chicken."

This brought more laughter, but this time Innis laughed too. Papa mightn't have had much practice being a father but he certainly knew what we would like. That afternoon he took us to the zoo.

There our storybook animals came to life. The lion, with his immense head, paced restlessly up and down his cage, and once he opened his mouth so wide that we could see right down to where his tonsils should have been. The tiger, with his stripes, and the spotted leopard looked like immense pussy cats as they too yawned and stretched themselves or curled up to sleep, ignoring our wide-eyed amazement.

The monkeys, intent on their search for body lice or swinging from bar to bar, chattered at us and seemed to grin. Suddenly John, watching a big one that had been sitting get out on a bar and swing with one arm, chirped, " Why has the monkey got a red bottom? "

Father looked at Mother and grinned, then answered, " Guess it's because she's fixing up to be a hussy."

" George David! " said Mother, in a voice we later recognized to be the one she used when she was shocked.

Father laughed and we moved to the bears' cages. There was a papa bear, a mamma bear, and a baby bear, just like in the story. The baby bear lay in its mother's arms and played with her fur like a real baby would play with a mother's dress. The mother patted it gently with her big paws.

We couldn't get enough of the bears, the strange birds with their gay feathers, the peacocks with long tails full of eyes, the talking parrots. But finally tired out, and sticky from candy and popcorn, we were taken to the hotel to sleep. The next day we were to board a train to Lead, where Mother would be Mrs. Minister and we would be the minister's children and Yankees.

Just as I was dropping off to sleep I remembered that I hadn't asked Father about Yankees as I had intended to.

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

3

LEAD, THE GOLD MINING CITY in the Black Hills, was located in the southwest corner of South Dakota. A few miles to the south was Nebraska; to the west, Wyoming. Not many years before our arrival the Sioux and other Indian tribes hunted in the hills around Lead. Battles had been fought between the Sioux and the Cheyennes until the Indians gave up some of their land to the white man, retiring to live on reserves.

"The last battle was in 1890, when there was a gold rush and the Indians feared the white man was going to steal his country," Father told Mother, as we rode along in the train. "It was called the Messiah War and the Battle of Wounded Knee."

Funny names, we thought, as the train ran through country that had belonged to the Indians. We pressed our noses against the window, but didn't catch even a glimpse of a Sioux. And neither were the Black Hills black, as we expected. They were green.

"What's a Yankee?" I asked Father, suddenly remembering it.

Papa began to sing:

" 'Yankee Doodle went to town
Upon a little pony.
He stuck a feather in his hat
And called it macaroni.' "

I liked the song, but I still didn't see that Yankees meant us. We didn't have a pony, nor did we have feathers in our hats – though Mother had one for one of her hats – so I asked him again.

" People living in Canada are called ' Canadians,' " Father said, " and sometimes they are called ' Canucks.' But people living in the United States are called ' Americans,' and sometimes ' Yankees.' "

Well, if that was all there was to it I didn't see that we had much to worry about and coaxed Father to sing the song again. He did, and soon we were all singing it.

Arriving in Lead, we were on edge with excitement. Father had told us that we would drive from the station to our new home in a car – a Ford Model T. Henry Ford had been making cars since 1903, and now, after several models had been tried out, the Model T was adopted in the States.

As we left the train and followed our parents through the station all we were interested in was having a ride in a horseless carriage. We saw one outside the door and a man was leaning against it. He was very short, with a long moustache, and legs that bowed as if they were more accustomed to riding a horse than walking. Father asked him if he would drive us to our new home.

He pinched his moustache and looked us over. " Eight of you," he drawled. " Wal, I reckon I can."

We wasted no time, Mother getting in the back seat with us four older ones and Father in the front holding Anne on one knee, Innis on the other. We twins stood up and leaned over the back of the front seat as the driver went to the front of the car to crank it.

He turned and turned the crank, his face getting redder and redder. He shouted to Father, " Pull out the choke! "

Father reached for some gadget on the dashboard and gave it a pull and suddenly there was a roar and the car began to shake. The driver jumped back, the crank in his hand, and ran for the front door, shouting, "Push in the choke!"

Father obeyed and the car stopped. Again the man cranked it and after several whirls the car roared again and he ran for the front door. He tossed the crank in, pressed his foot down on one of the three pedals shooting up from the floor, and we started with a jerk that threw me into Mother's lap. Then we were off down the main street of Lead, dodging past pedestrians who grabbed their hats and got out of our way.

Lead was a frontier mining city of ten thousand people. Most of them were Slavs working in the mines, and though the street of stores and offices looked fairly deserted, we later learned that on Saturday nights it resembled a Western movie town of drunken brawls, including gunning and knifing. But we left the downtown and turned up an inclined street to where the houses perched like eagle nests on rocky crags. It seemed we had hardly started our ride before the car stopped.

"We're home," said Father, but from the street all we could see was stone steps going up between two stone walls.

"Last one to the top is an Indian," said Mackay, and we tumbled out of the car and raced after him, almost knocking each other down.

Of course baby Anne was the Indian. At the top we found ourselves on a wide green lawn in front of a cottage. Another lawn separated it from the First Presbyterian Church, and beyond it were other houses.

We chased each other over the lawn like a bunch of mice released from a cage, then returned to the cottage that was to be our first real home.

Father was showing it off to Mother. It had four rooms and a back porch. The parlor had chairs, a couch, and a table,

but the tan rug, covered with pink and yellow roses, and the organ were what he had bought, and he was very proud of himself.

"Play it, Elsie," urged Father, going to the organ.

Mother was anxious to see the rest of the house, but she saw Father was excited about the organ, so she sat down on the stool and we gathered around her. She played and we all sang:

> "'Jesus bids us shine, with a clear, pure light,
> Like a little candle burning in the night;
> In this world of darkness we must shine,
> You in your small corner, and I in mine.'"

I guess that was Mother's philosophy, and it was a good song to begin our sojourn in our first real home. But we weren't thinking of that then. We followed Father across the hall to the study, which he was to use during the day and we four older ones used at night: the boys sleeping on a folding couch, and we girls in a folding bed. It too had a carpet, a dark red one, with other colors in the border and a circle in the center that was used on many an evening for playing marbles, Father as enthusiastic as we were.

"You mustn't play for keeps," he told us from the start. "That's gambling and a sin."

But in spite of the warning it was alarming how Mackay's and John's marbles and agates increased, to say nothing about Florence's and mine. Then one evening Father played us all. He used the thumb and knuckle system and most of us used the thumb and end of forefinger. That night he cleared us all out of marbles, and in spite of his saying we shouldn't play for keeps, he kept ours for a whole week, and we had no marbles to trade for agates nor any marbles to win more.

"Now you see how the other fellow feels when you keep his marbles," said Father, when he gave them back to us. We did.

There was only one real bedroom in the house and Father and Mother used it and put up another bed for Anne and Innis. Then there was the kitchen. It was big, and really the dining room too. At night the city's searchlight would sweep past the kitchen window, pausing to peer in, then finally move on. Someone told us that it was looking to see if we were in bed. If we weren't, and saw it coming, we would dive under the table and hide until it was gone.

It, like God, the devil, and Santa Claus, helped our parents to keep us good. But we really lived in that kitchen. We had our morning prayers there after Father or Mother had read from the Bible. We knelt by our chairs while Father said a short prayer, but no matter how short it was our knees would get sore and we'd shift from one to the other, and peek between our fingers.

At night Mother would mend, iron, or knit by the table, and as she knitted she would read American history, learning all about George Washington, the forty-eight states and their capitals. Other times as she worked Father would pace the floor reading his sermons to her.

Our new house had a bathroom too, though it did not have a tub. It also had a phone and electric lights. We went from the house to the back yard where there was a sort of carriage house with a slanting roof. Father showed us his peas and beans, which had been flattened two weeks before by hailstones as big as glass agates.

"They'll never amount to anything," said Father, though they had begun to grow again.

We were hardly back in the house, and Mother hadn't got her hat off, before the visitors began to arrive. We didn't mind. They brought cake, fruit, jelly, pies, fresh buns, and bread.

"We knew you would need something to eat," the women said, "and a man wouldn't think of that."

"Even if I did," said Father, smiling the smile we came to recognize as the one he used on the women members of his

congregation, "I couldn't bake a pie like yours." And he began to praise the cooking he'd had at their homes while he was batching, waiting for us to come and live with him.

"Flattery is a sin," said Mother, after they left, "and I can bake as well as they can."

"Don't I know it," said Father, smacking his lips. "I've even dreamed about your pies and cakes."

I guess Father was just using tact, as Mother didn't call it flattery. She just looked at him. "You're so thin I'd say they hadn't fed you much," she said.

"Now, Molly," said Father, using his pet name for her, "don't be too hard on the women. They've been more than kind."

Mother was soon to learn that the women in the congregation liked to be kind to their minister. There was something about a minister that made them want to feed him. Perhaps they felt that because he lived with spiritual thoughts so much the physical man was neglected. But even though Mother learned it, she was often furious — jealous, Father called it — at women who were always coming to talk to him, bringing him their problems, and baking too.

Watermelon cakes were the style that year, and we ate so many pink, green, and yellow combinations with thick colored icings, and sometimes with raisins for seeds, that to this day I can't eat them.

"It's not that I think you can't cook, my dear Mrs. Robinson," they would say, presenting some dainty, "but you're so busy with the children."

"Of course," agreed Mother sweetly, "and the children like good food too."

Then she would almost flounce out to the kitchen and make tea, and though I often wondered why she didn't serve the cake the women had brought, she would serve her own food, and if Father didn't praise it — well — he would hear about it.

One day Father said, "I notice it always takes you longer to make tea, Molly, when the homely women come to call."

" Nonsense," said Mother, " it just seems longer to you."

One time when Mother was making tea I peeked into the parlor. A pretty lady, in a blue silk dress, a hat with an ostrich feather on it, and rings on her fingers, was patting Father's hand.

At supper that night I said, " Papa, why did the pretty lady pat your hand? "

Father's face got red and Mother gave him a cross look. " Yes, why? " she said, passing a piece of pie to him so quickly that it almost fell into his lap.

" Now, Molly," he said, " she's going to give a hundred dollars to the home missions."

" So you had to hold her hand because you were so pleased," said Mother, " and I suppose you would have kissed her if she'd given two hundred dollars."

" I wasn't holding her hand," said Father, ignoring the rest of Mother's speech, and I wondered why Mother thought that, as I had said she was patting his hand. " Home mission funds are important," Father added.

How important, Mother was to learn later. She was also to learn that a minister's wife had to develop a sense of humor and share her husband, even to the point of hurting, with his people. And Father had to be polite. He couldn't always be suspecting every pretty woman of falling in love with him.

" I'm not that stuck-up," he told Mother.

" Why not? " said Mother. " I fell in love with you."

Father had no answer to that, and I guess Mother found out that being a minister's wife wasn't all the fun she had thought it was going to be. No matter how she felt she had to be charming to whoever came to visit or went to our church. She had to be nice to the poor as well as the rich who supported the church, which paid six hundred dollars. This, added to the four hundred from the mission board, gave Father a thousand dollars a year, the most money he had ever earned. She had to be nice to the cranks as well as the nice people.

" I'll take the poor every time," said Mother. " They come to church because they really want spiritual help."

But we all liked Mrs. Dent, as we called the wife of the superintendent of the gold mine. We liked him too. Whenever they came to call they always brought candy or fruit and they took us for rides, not only in their big car but also in their two-seated buggy.

But all this was after being in Lead for a while; after the teas and dinners they had for Mr. and Mrs. Minister. For the minister's children, the first month in Lead was spent in getting acquainted.

There were enough children in our family to play at most any game without others, but in spite of that we soon had other playmates. The crowd of us doing things together always seemed to attract other children; or perhaps they were curious about us, wondering if the minister's children were even of the same species.

Even though Mother wouldn't let us go barefooted as we had at Grandpa's farm, we soon convinced our playmates that we were as human as they were, an attitude that we kept for the years to follow.

We showed them that we could skip as fast, play jacks, marbles, ball, or any other game just as well as they could, if not better. Our insistence on being better at things grew, no doubt, from our parent's constant advice that as minister's children we must excel at school as well as in goodness.

The first Saturday night in our new home, Mother washed all our heads, put the girls' hair up in the once-a-week rag curlers, and then prepared to bathe us in the usual manner — girls first, then boys.

Father had been studying all day, getting his two sermons ready for Sunday, and we'd stayed outside to play. We were in different stages of undress in the kitchen, and Mother had the tub half filled with warm water, and more water heating on the stove, when a knock came on the front door.

Father went to the door and, to Mother's surprise, came

to the kitchen along with a big dark-haired man with a black mustache.

"This is Dr. Lane, Elsie," he said. "He dropped in to look you and the children over."

Mother rose from her knees where she was rubbing Anne's back, and wiped her hands on her apron. "How do you do?" she said primly, giving Father a "Why didn't you wait?" look.

"Fine and I can see you are too," he said, giving Mother's flushed cheeks and wisps of curls that the steam had made around her forehead an admiring look, then he turned to look us over. "I'd say there's nothing wrong with this flock either." He grinned, then turned to Father. "Are all these children really yours, Reverend?"

Father started to reply, then, his eyes twinkling, he spoke to Mother, "Are all these children mine, Elsie?"

"George David," she said in her shocked voice, and the men laughed and started for the parlor.

The doctor turned at the door. "If you ever need my services, just send for me," he said.

Mother's cheeks were red. "My children are very healthy," she said.

"And as pretty as their mother," said Dr. Lane, then left, grinning.

Mother was none too gentle as she washed us, and we knew she was cross at Father. Later, when we were tucked into bed and the doctor gone, I heard my parents talking. I was trying to sleep on my stomach as my curls hurt, but I couldn't, so I got up and went to the door.

Papa was laughing but Mother was looking cross. "You shouldn't have asked if the children were all yours," she said. "Dr. Lane will think you're flighty."

"Not me," said Father, reaching for her, "but you."

Mother tried to pull out of Father's arms, then suddenly started to laugh. "It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him that the three youngest belonged to the butcher, the baker,

and the candlestick maker," she said.

"You vixen," said Father, then he was kissing her, and I slipped back to bed.

Mother wasn't really cross at Father, I decided, but later when I asked her if some of us did belong to the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, she said, "Of course not, and you run along and play and forget about it."

Now that we were minister's children, Sunday was the biggest day of the week, beginning with the Saturday night bath. On Saturday too Mother did all the cooking for Sunday, so that it would be a day of rest as well as worship. Yet it was Father's day of work.

Sunday morning, as Father stayed in the study, we tiptoed around the house or looked at books either in the house or quietly on the lawn until it was time to get ready for church. Father went across the lawn early, but we, in our best clothes, came with Mother. Once in the church, we followed Mother in twos, down the long aisle, past pews filled with parents and other children, to one reserved for the minister's family.

"Do not whisper or squirm in church," Mother had warned us, but to obey was almost impossible, even with Mother's warning looks, and sometimes Father's sharp glance. Then as soon as church was over we would follow Mother up the aisle, linger while she spoke to friends, and finally escape across the lawn to our house.

Our dinner was at noon, with cold meat, warmed-up vegetables, pie or fruit, and plenty of milk. Then we must settle down with books. And if we went outside, we could not play the games we did on other days – even though the other children were playing them. But there was always the Catechism and the Sunday school lesson.

Mother had a class, and we went back to church with her, this time to the basement, where little chairs were arranged in circles. We sat on them, sang songs, said our text; as minister's children, we must not make one mistake or forget to learn them, even if the words meant nothing to us.

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

One Sunday, hardly a month after we arrived, the teacher in John's and Innis' circle of little chairs told a story about Joe, a little African boy, whom the missionary had saved from starving, and fed him until he was fat, and gave him new clothes. The little African loved the missionary and used to follow him around and listen to his Bible stories until he became a Christian.

"He was the happiest boy in the world," said the teacher, "because he was saved by the Lord Jesus Christ."

When the story was finished, the teacher asked questions. "Was little Joe happy because he was well fed?" she asked.

"No!" cried the class, all but Innis who didn't get his mouth shaped to say the word.

"Was little Joe happy because he had fine clothes?" she asked.

"No!" cried the class again, all but Innis.

"Was little Joe happy because he was saved by the Lord Jesus Christ?"

In the very slight pause that followed, Innis who finally had the answer ready cried out in a resounding voice, "No!" But this time the answer should have been, "Yes," and all the children laughed. Innis' mouth pouted, but the teacher patted his fair curls, and the right answer was given.

This was just one of the many stories told of us as the minister's children.

When Sunday school was over, we went home carrying pretty, bright Sunday school cards and papers called *Dewdrops*. Little did I realize that someday I would be having tiny-tot stories in that same paper.

After supper, a light one, we got ready for bed. Mother sang in the choir at night, and Florence baby-sat. When Mother left us, we would stand in our nightgowns by the window and watch the big folks go to the evening service.

For a few Sundays, until Mother heard of it, we were inspired to help them on their way, and we would holler at the top of our voices, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and follow

it with, " Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus."

Sunday over, we could be as noisy as we liked for the first few days of the week. Sometimes we would go visiting with Father – up and down the steps we loved and he found difficult with his artificial leg.

Sometimes we would go to the church weddings, where everyone looked gay and happy. Other times the weddings would be in homes. Father took Florence and me to see the bride, who looked like a fairy princess in a white dress and fluffy veil. I remember at one house wedding being offered a second piece of cake. But Mother had warned, " Just take one piece of cake, Brownie." I hesitated, but the temptation was too great for more than one polite refusal. Finally in desperation I said, " It is good cake, but Mother said that I must be polite because I'm a minister's daughter." Somehow that made even Father laugh, and I had another piece of cake.

The weddings were laughter times, but the funerals in our church were weeping times. The corpse's women relatives wore long black veils, and the men had black bands around their coat sleeves.

Life seemed very queer, and when we asked about the funerals, Mother explained that when people got old or very ill, they died and went to heaven.

I had seen only one dead person – Grandma LeBeau. We were at her house and I left Mother, who was in the parlor crying, and slipped away to Grandma's room. Grandpa's old dog, Rover, followed me. He slipped into the bedroom as I opened the door and trotted to the four-poster and put his two paws on the patchwork quilt. Then he put his pointed nose on his paws and moaned in his throat.

I stood beside him and looked at Grandma lying in bed with her hands crossed on her breast. A white cloth was tied under her chin and over her head as if she had a toothache. I touched her hands. They were cold.

" Grandma," I whispered. " Grandma, wake up. Mamma is crying."

But Grandma did not move or open her eyes and I felt queer and ran back to Mother. "Why won't Grandma wake up?" I wailed.

Mother took me on her knee. "Grandma is dead, dear," she said. "She has gone to heaven."

"She has not," I blurted. "She's in her bed."

Mother tried to explain, and finally told me that if I'd be a good girl someday I would see Grandma in heaven. As time passed, I began to believe that someday I would see Grandma sitting in her cretonne barrel chair in her kitchen below a picture of Queen Victoria – but then her kitchen would be in heaven too.

Still, watching the funerals in our church, I did not like them. Sometimes they came at the end of the week when Father was getting his sermon ready and I didn't see why they couldn't come at the first of the week.

After funerals we learned about widows. The Ladies' Aid always seemed to put on an extra drive to send clothes and food to widows, who, we learned, were the wives after their husbands died. Widows became something special.

After one of the funerals John came to Mother. "What is dying?" he asked.

This time Mother said, "Dying is just opening a gate to a new world called heaven," and Father, coming into the room, smilingly agreed, then got on his thinking look. It wasn't long afterward that he preached a sermon called, "The Gate to Heaven." It wasn't the first or the last time that Mother gave him an idea for a sermon, but I guess that was part of her job as Mrs. Minister.

Father was pretty stern about some things, and one of them was that we children should be perfect in church. This meant not a word or a giggle while he was preaching. One Sunday, not long after we became the minister's children in earnest, Father was preaching about the importance of childhood. He called this sermon, "God's Garden of Life." I still have a copy of it.

We had heard him reading it to Mother, and parts of it took our fancy. For example, he told about Cornelia, the widowed daughter of Scipio Africanus, who was asked to show her jewels to a noble and wealthy suitor. She left the room and returned with her two little boys. "These are my jewels," she said, putting a hand on the head of each. Then Father went on to say the boys and girls were their parent's jewels, "more precious and more valuable than all the jewels and diadems that ever crowned the heads of royalty."

We understood that because we knew the hymn:

> "Little children, little children,
> Who love their Redeemer,
> Are the jewels, precious jewels,
> His loved and His own."

And Father had chosen that hymn as one to go with his sermon. He had gathered from his reading other definitions of children that we liked. "A child is a bursting bud on the tree of life. . . . A quaint little craft called innocence, laden with simplicity and love. . . . A dewdrop of glory. . . . A lovely being, scarcely formed or molded. . . . A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded."

He went on to tell about how children's imaginations were captured by a flitting butterfly, a rose by the side of the road, a bird's nest, a rainbow, stars in the heavens, and all things God made free to mankind – all things that showed him as a God of love and beauty. He explained that through these natural forces a child could be led to know God and understand his goodness.

But what captured our imagination was another example Father used to show how a child's character could be molded. He took a small branch of a flowering shrub that had many bends and twists in it. And he showed how easily the branch could be bent to straighten out the bends and twists as compared to the impossibility of straightening out the bends and twists in the branches of a big tree – an oak for example.

"This," he said, "illustrates the ease with which the child's life can be shaped compared with the difficulty in reforming older people whose lives have become warped by sin."

That Sunday Anne was sick and Mother did not come to church with us but told us to be good. Well, we were up until after the twig example; then Father's sermon became more involved and we lost interest. Mackay and I started to whisper and giggle.

Suddenly Father's voice ceased, but we kept on. Then he walked down from the pulpit right to our pew. He took Mackay by the belt of his suit, lifted him up in the air and held him there as he wriggled like a mouse caught by its tail. Then he sat him down with a bump in the pew behind us. My heart jumped to my mouth, thinking that Father would grab me by the pink sash of my white dress and hoist me back beside my twin. But he didn't, nor did he say a word, but walked back to the pulpit and continued his sermon. I do not remember even hearing a titter from the God-fearing congregation, as Father straightened the bend in Mackay's life branch.

Father ended his sermon with, "Let us learn from our children, so we shall begin to be and to become wise." And, whether he realized it or not, in quoting from the founder of kindergartens, he had yet to learn a great deal from us in the next few years.

On Monday, Mackay came in from play with a black eye. A boy, his age, had mocked him for what the minister had done to him, and called him a sissy. Mackay could do nothing about what had happened, but he made certain that he wouldn't be called a sissy again. In the ensuing fight the other boy got a bloody nose as well as a black eye. To our surprise Father, on hearing about it, did not spank Mackay to take out another bend. In fact he grinned, and seemed sort of proud of his son's prowess as a fighter.

Father was to preach many sermons on children in the following years and no doubt we supplied him with first-hand

material as he learned to be a parent.

There was the time he took Florence and me downtown to buy the doll carriages he had promised us. He went without Mother, which he later discovered was very unwise. From the first it was clear that the slim, red-headed clerk in the toy shop was on our side. He agreed with us that the plum-red leather, collapsible carriage, which was almost big enough for a baby, was the best, if not the only buy.

Father hemmed and hawed and tried to get us to look at smaller carriages, also cheaper ones. But we put our dolls in the leather carriages and wouldn't budge them. Red-faced, Father finally gave in and we wheeled our carriages home, as proud as new mothers taking their first baby for an outing. Then, in the middle of the street, we decided we hadn't thanked him properly, and to his embarrassment we insisted on kissing him then and there.

Another time he took the whole six of us down to Dr. Lane's office to have us vaccinated. Then it wasn't a matter of sticking a needle in your arm and swabbing it with alcohol. No, indeed! First the top skin was scraped off in a neat round circle; then, as the blood bubbled up, vaccine was applied. What made it exciting was that Florence fainted. We thought she was dead and set up a howl that took both the bushy-browed doctor and Father some time to stop.

The next day we all had stiff, swollen arms, which we watched excitedly to see who would have the biggest scab — the one who had being the hero. I don't remember who won that distinction.

4

WHEN SCHOOL STARTED it was Father who went with us to intrdouce us to our teachers. Anne was the only one left at home with Mother as John and Innis started to kindergarten. Mackay and I had gone to kindergarten in Kingston, and the previous spring we had gone for a few days with Florence to a school just outside of Fort Stewart, near the maple sugar camp. On the way home we had watched the maple sirup boiling in big black kettles. We filled snow cups with it, and while we waited for it to harden into candy, we played tag among the tapped trees.

But at Lead the school was within sight of our house, and it was school in earnest. Grade One for Mackay and me! Our teacher's name was Miss Beebee, and we thought her very pretty with her dark hair and eyes. From her we learned to salute the Stars and Stripes, and to sing "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," as fervently as any little American.

The very first day she played a trick on me that made me blush with mortification, to say nothing about embarrassing Mr. and Mrs. Minister.

We had a small curly-headed Negro boy in our class called Lincoln. He was the first colored boy I had known outside of a storybook and I was very curious about him. That morn-

ing, as we bowed our heads for prayer, Miss Beebee said, "If you see anyone peeking during prayers, please tell me."

Wishing to make an impression and to show how bright I was, I kept one eye opened and watched to catch someone peeking. Lincoln was doing the same thing. So as soon as the "Amen" came, and the bowed heads lifted, I waved my hand.

"Yes, Elsie," said Miss Beebee.

"I saw Lincoln peeking in prayers, Miss Beebee," I piped, delighted to have caught a peeking Tom.

"How do *you* know?" asked Miss Beebee, the corners of her lips turning up, while the other children giggled.

Then I realized that I had fallen into a trap and hadn't been bright at all, and had to fight hard to keep the tears from falling. It didn't help to have Mackay tell on me at home either.

"That wasn't fair," said Mother.

"It will teach Brownie not to peek again," said Father, grinning.

Mother frowned. "If Miss Beebee were ugly, you wouldn't say that," she said.

I didn't see what difference that would have made, but Father just laughed and said, "Now, Molly, watch out for the green-eyed monster."

Later, Mother told me that I must be a good little girl in school because Father was a minister and we must help him by being a good example to the other children.

"I don't want to be a good example," I said. "I want to be like the other children."

"You can't be," said Mother, and I saw there was no use insisting, but in the following months I determined that I wouldn't be called a sissy like Mackay had been, nor would I be called a goody-goody.

Still, I liked school and Lincoln was always a source of amusement. He had a voice like a bird, and Miss Beebee encouraged him to sing. None of the white children could

do nearly as well. Neither could we swear with the same fluency. Miss Beebee was always washing Lincoln's mouth out with soap. He would sputter and blow bubbles while his face would screw into all sorts of funny shapes, and only when he promised not to swear would she let him go to the fountain to rinse out his mouth. He always came back into the room, his white teeth gleaming in a wide smile.

When our parents heard about the soap mouthwash they used it on us whenever they caught us practicing some of Lincoln's choice words.

As well as being Mrs. Minister and going to teas and Ladies' Aid – the latter we had already learned was a group of women who met, sewed clothes for the poor or the heathens in other lands, made quilts, and had teas to make money for our church and Father's salary – Mother had her job of looking after us.

Much of her time was spent washing, ironing, sewing, cooking, telling us stories, and singing songs. The new ones she learned that we liked were "Old Black Joe," "My Old Kentucky Home," and "Old Folks at Home." Some evenings, as she knitted at the kitchen table, she would read from *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* These songs and the novel gave us sympathy with the colored race and killed prejudices that might have taken root in our avid minds.

But there were other stories we begged for too – fairy stories. We loved them. To us, fairies had an important part to play in life. Didn't the real fairies go around doing kind deeds to men, animals, birds, and flowers? In the most exciting fairy story about people wasn't it always the bad man or woman who was punished, and rightly so? Fairies made the world a wonderful place in which even the flowers, trees, and animals were one with mankind. We certainly found it as easy to believe in fairies as in God, Santa Claus, or the devil.

It always made me happy to imagine I was the good fairy or kind princess and not the ugly or cruel one. To this day, throwing a bit of tangled thread away, instead of patiently

picking out the snarl and using it, brings back the story of the two sisters. The elder sister was cross-tempered, lazy, and wasteful; the younger was sweet, with a kind word for everyone, and very thrifty. There was a handsome prince coming in search of a bride and all the young ladies spun themselves dresses for the occasion. The elder sister made a beautiful dress, but whenever she came to a snarl in her spun thread she threw it away. The younger sister made herself a dress out of the snarls, and she was the one the prince chose to become his princess.

There was another story about two sisters: one had frogs and toads jump from her mouth every time she spoke; the other dropped rubies and diamonds. Oh, how a story beginning, "Once upon a time," would bring us to attention!

Father was more in favor of our learning stories about real people — Lincoln, Washington, and hundreds of others. We liked them too, and the song that we learned about Lincoln still comes back to me. It was to the tune of "Yankee Doodle," and went thus:

"When Lincoln was a little boy
There was no time for reading.
He used to work the livelong day,
Aplowing and aseeding."

Then the song went on to tell how Lincoln did his reading at night by the light of the fireplace.

Mother didn't stop telling us fairy stories, even the ones about the fairies who had wings so tiny one could hardly see them. Some people claimed they had seen real, live fairies and we kept looking for them.

"Now, George David," said Mother, when he objected, "if you want children to see heaven, angels, and God, helping them to see fairies as God's helpers for good in the world is just as important as stories about real people. It helps them to believe in the unseen."

Father started to say something, then his thinking look

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

came over his face, and without another word he went to the study and stayed there for hours. It wasn't until the next Sunday that we learned why. He preached a sermon called "Faith in the Unseen," and when he came to the part in which he said that when a child or an adult believed in fairies as unseen forces working for good in the world, it freed them from the bondage of unseeing dullness and gave wings to their imagination, he looked down at Mother. There was a twinkle in his eyes, and she knew that it was her defense of fairy stories that had given him the idea for his sermon. And never again did I hear Father object to fairy stories.

Our Bible stories were often just as exciting as fairy stories, especially the ones about hell. But, to our surprise, when we did naughty things, fearfully hoping that the devil would appear out of the bowels of the earth, never once did we see him.

Angels on the other hand were often a comfort. At night if we were scared we would imagine they were in the room hovering over us, watching to see that no harm came to us. A picture we had of an angel standing behind a little girl about to fall over a cliff, helped us in this belief. I was so sure on some nights that angels were in the room with me that I could even hear the rustle of their wings, and knew that they would not let the devil at me.

One day Mackay came in from playing, his eyes big with excitement. "Mamma," he called. "Jimmy says there isn't a really, truly devil."

"What do you mean?" asked Mamma.

"He says the devil is just like Santa Claus — he's your father."

Mother was aghast, since up to then we had believed in Santa Claus, and still did in spite of Mackay's words. And why not? Last Christmas Father hadn't even been home and Santa Claus had come, leaving us gifts and filling our stockings with nuts and candy. Somehow Mother explained away

Mackay's revelation and our faith was restored. She said Santa Claus was a spirit of giving, and we already knew about our spirits, or souls, going to heaven when we died.

I had even taken upon myself to explain what a spirit meant to a friend, but not before trying to get her to tell me what she thought first. It happened after a funeral, at which I knew Father sent the dead person to heaven if he was good, and to the bad place if he was bad. In our funeral games we pretended to do the same thing.

"Don't you ever play funerals?" I asked my playmate.

She gave me a funny look and said, "No."

"You know what a spirit is, don't you?" I persisted.

"Sure," she said. "What do you say it is?"

"Why, why —" I began, then was stumped for a moment, "it — it's your skin without your bones," I said quickly.

"Sure, that's what I thought," she said, and I let the subject drop, though I was none too sure of myself. But angels seemed to have bodies and we were going to be angels someday — and it was only our spirits that went to heaven, so a spirit must be something you could see when you were able to see one. Santa Claus had a body too, even though we didn't often get to see him — just at Christmas concerts.

And that very Christmas we did see Santa Claus again. He came to the church where a giant Christmas tree was covered with gifts for the Sunday school children. Santa took them off one by one and read out the names. We all got presents right from Santa, so we knew Mackay was wrong because Father was the chairman of the program and just stood on the platform and smiled at Santa.

Every little boy and girl had a recitation to give too, and then we sang the Christmas story, as one group of children set up the manger scene. Mother had rehearsed us for it and she played the organ. When the thatch-roofed stable was set up, with its background of hovering angels and the star, and Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were inside, the three Wise Men approaching on their camels, the shepherds kneeling, we

started the singing story with "Silent Night! Holy Night." It was followed by "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," "Away in a Manger," then three stanzas of "The First Nowell." This became a Christmas ritual that we kept until we were grown up.

Santa Claus came to our house as well as to the church. We wondered how he would get down our chimney, but somehow he managed. He left toys for each of us and ate the bread and milk we left on the table for him. We had other gifts given to us by members of the congregation. Mr. and Mrs. Dent sent us two kegs of grapes packed in sawdust, a box of apples, and chocolates in grass-woven baskets. We girls kept our baskets as treasure chests. They gave Mother and Father each a twenty-five dollar gold piece — the first we had ever seen.

Being minister's children at Christmas time, we decided, was fine, even if during the year we had our problems.

Florence was a sensitive, high-strung child. She would talk in her sleep and sometimes even walk in her sleep. I would waken and find her gone from our folding bed and would shiver for a few minutes, wondering if the devil had stolen her in spite of the guardian angels — who just might have gone to sleep. Then I would hide under the covers in case he came looking for me too.

Other nights I would get up and look for her. One time I found her in Mr. and Mrs. Minister's bedroom. She was still asleep but half crying and talking about Father's poor leg, which was cut off below the knee. This time she was worrying about the stump being covered with boils that Father got because he was so thin and run down when he came to Lead to preach. Watching her gave me a fluttery feeling in my stomach, but I was fascinated too, waiting for her to waken.

It always struck Father as funny or perhaps he was embarrassed. Anyway he would laugh, but Mother would waken Florence by taking her on her knee and talking softly until

she was reassured that Father's leg didn't hurt him now.

This leg was always a mystery to us. We had heard Father say he could feel his toes cold even though his foot wasn't there. He could even imagine wriggling them, and that seemed impossible. As a rule we were not conscious of the missing leg because the artificial one was so real. It was only when he had boils and had to wear his peg leg that we realized that he didn't have a real foot. When he wasn't using the peg leg, it came into our games for one-legged pirates. But Florence couldn't forget Father's leg that was gone and had nightmares.

Another night she walked in her sleep and left the house. Mother and Father had gone to a Burns concert at the school. Father had always claimed he was Scottish, even though his ancestors came from the north of Ireland. He said they were originally from Scotland and had just gone to Ireland after some Scottish war. It wasn't until I was grown up that he ever put down in writing that he was Irish, and that year, though I'd always claimed to be Irish, I decided that I'd better be the same as Father for Government papers, and put down that I was Scottish. So we were still different.

But that night, in spite of a light snowfall, Florence crossed the road to the school and was mounting the steps in her nightgown when one of the Sunday school teachers recognized her and brought her home.

Mother had women friends in Lead and one that I fell in love with. She was our first "Florence Nightingale" and Father teasingly called her that. We called her "Matron." She was a tall woman with reddish-gold hair and blue eyes, and, except when she was visiting, she wore a white uniform and a white cap.

On my seventh birthday, in January, I was invited to spend the afternoon at the hospital with her. She took my picture on the hospital veranda, then fixed me up with a white apron and cap and took me through the wards.

I was very sympathetic, going from bed to bed and asking

the patients, mostly miners who had been injured, how they felt. I also asked them if they'd lost a leg like my papa. Matron let me have a peak at the new babies, but it was in the men's accident ward that she let me do as I pleased. I carried them drinking water, dusted off the stands (already spotless), and took the little broom she gave me for a birthday present and worked on the floors.

The men joked with me, and one big fellow with a bandage around his head and over one eye asked me if I was going to be a nurse when I grew up.

I thought of saying yes, then remembered that Uncle Tom used to laugh at me when I said I was going to be a nurse so that I could have lots of babies.

"Then you'll be an old maid," Uncle Tom had said.

I had one aunt who was called an old maid because at twenty-five she wasn't married. She was teased about it so I knew that being an old maid was an undesirable future. Mackay and I had even tried to do something to save Aunt L from being an old maid – purely by accident, I will admit.

She was visiting us in Kingston while Father was going to college and Father had a friend whom we called Uncle Bert, going to college too. He had often come to see Aunt L, so one day we decided to play hooky from kindergarten and go and visit this new uncle. We hadn't counted on his asking us why we had come to see him. Grownups never asked each other why they called. It was always, "I'm delighted to see you." But we found out that you couldn't always rely on grownups, and when he asked us why, we were stumped.

"Aunt Lydia wants to see you." I said the first thing that came into my head, and Mackay repeated it.

After a few questions that did not change our declaration, Uncle Bert sent us to kindergarten and went to see Aunt Lydia, who was very prim and proper. When we got home we were asked why we had told a fib, which scared us into telling a few more. But we didn't escape punishment. Our bottoms were warmed, and we were then made to sit on hard

chairs, which I think was adding insult to injury.

Swinging on the garden gate that evening, because it was more comfortable than going for a ride in our buggy, I wondered why Aunt Lydia should have minded our sending Uncle Bert to see her. If I'd been the aunt and she the little girl, I would have given her some of the chocolates that Uncle Bert had brought along — but she didn't, not that time.

Remembering this in a flash as the miner asked me if I was going to be a nurse when I grew up, I hesitated. Then I thought of all the attention the widows got after a funeral and I had my answer.

"I'm going to be a widow," I replied, tossing my curls.

The miner laughed. "She's going to be a widow, fellows," he said, and they all laughed. Then he turned to me. "Why a widow, little girl?"

"Well," I said, "I don't want to be an old maid. I don't want to be married, so I'll be a widow with six children."

Matron rescued me from their laughter and took me to her own private sitting room where we had a birthday tea and a birthday cake with seven candles on it. I felt very important being the guest of a grownup and would have liked to stay longer, but she put on my coat and bonnet, and after letting me say good-by to the miners she took me home, the rest of the cake with me. A few years later Matron was killed in a train wreck, but to me she is still alive.

Other interesting things happened in Lead too. One night there was an explosion in the gold mine. The next morning Father took us to see the cave-in. Already there was a fence around it and policemen keeping the crowds away from danger. We children did our best to get close to the hole, where there had once been houses. We thought we might be able to see right down to hell, which we knew was in the bowels of the earth. But, no matter how we tried, Father or a policeman sent us back. We didn't realize that lives were lost, not until Father had some more funerals.

That spring we lost Anne. She disappeared about four o'clock on a Saturday afternoon when we older ones were supposed to be looking after her. Mother became frantic. Father phoned the police. We children ran up and down the streets and in and out of our neighbors' houses calling Anne. But no Anne appeared. The search went on until lights began to twinkle like huge fireflies from the hill-perched houses, but still no Anne.

For the first time we heard about kidnapers and what they did.

"They're terrible men and women who go around stealing pretty children," the other children told us.

"Why?" we cried, and received several reasons.

"'Cause they ain't got any of their own."

"Maybe they want to sell them for money."

"Sometimes they eat kidnaped children," said one boy, and by this time we were all in tears.

We could imagine rosy-cheeked, big-eyed Anne being made into soup in a big, black maple-sirup kettle, or roasted in an oven. We ran home crying out our fears, but no sooner were we inside our house than the phone rang. It was the police saying they had found Anne. She had been picked up by a young woman while crossing the single-tracked railway bridge. The woman had taken Anne home and phoned the police, and now they were bringing her home.

That night we were too excited to sleep, and when we did we had nightmares. Florence walked in her sleep, going to Anne's crib and carrying her back to our bed.

That spring, too, Anne got pneumonia, and Dr. Lane was in and out of our house several times a day. He made her better, though he advised Mother to take her to Rapid City for a couple of weeks. Mother, did, staying with the minister's family there, and Father was left to batch and take care of us.

While Mother was away, Mackay broke his arm. He and his boy friends had taken to climbing the roof of the carriage

shed, and jumping from the slanted edge across a pile of stones. To shouts of, "I can jump the farthest," they kept it up most of one afternoon. Then Mackay, determined to outjump even himself, slipped and landed on the stones.

Again Dr. Lane was called in, and Mackay went around with his arm in a cast and sling. The other children brought him marbles, candy, and toys until we felt he was to be envied.

Father was funny too when Mother was away. He would roam about the house as if he were looking for something. One time I found him sitting in the kitchen holding Mother's knitting.

"Can you knit too?" I asked.

He dropped the knitting and his face got sort of red and he said, "Of course not. I was just looking at it."

He looked at Mother's picture too — the one of her with the first five of us around her knees. She had Innis on her lap and John by his jacket to keep him from running away. Florence, looking like an angel, was leaning her elbow on the chair. I was laughing, and have since been told that at the same time I was pinching my twin brother. That no doubt accounts for the painful expression on his face.

"Where were you?" I asked, seeing Father looking at it.

"Away at college," he said, and put it down. "Now let's get the house cleaned up and surprise your Mother."

We worked like elves and thought Father would never be satisfied. Finally, warning us to keep it tidy, he went to the train and brought Mother and Anne home. No wonder Father missed Mother, we thought. Everything seemed different with her home again. She made Mackay think he was a soldier. The food tasted better; the house seemed full of warmth and laughter.

"Don't go away and leave us again," said Papa, waltzing her around the kitchen, as we girls gathered up the dishes.

"You managed without me when you left home," said Mother, laughing at him.

"That was different," said Father. "I was preparing myself to make a home for you."

Then he squeezed her and kissed her. "George David," said Mother, "have you forgotten the children?"

"Haven't had a chance to," he grumbled.

It wasn't long after Mother's return that we learned that we were going to have another baby. We had noticed that Mother wasn't wearing her white or gray princess dresses and had made a pretty deep-red gown. But a baby! A baby was all right with us even if we had to buy false teeth for it, but where would it come from this time?

Anne had come from a pumpkin. We knew that for a certainty and hadn't been able to forget it. But we wouldn't have any pumpkins for months and our yard wasn't even big enough to grow them.

Anne had been born in Marmora, Ontario. We had known that a baby was expected and we girls coaxed the doctor who came to visit us (we thought) to bring another girl. The boys demanded another boy. He promised to grant both our wishes, but he didn't.

Grandma LeBeau was with Mother at the time, and one day when the doctor called, Father left him with Mother and Grandmother. He got the butcher knife from the kitchen and took us to the garden. Among the vines, spreading over the garden plot, large yellow pumpkins stood in golden mounds.

"It's time the baby came," said Father, going from pumpkin to pumpkin tapping them, then putting his ear down to listen. "And I'm sure there's a baby in one of these."

Wide-eyed, we five children followed him, tapping and listening, each one certain that a different pumpkin held our new baby. Finally, at some sign from the house Father picked up the biggest pumpkin, cut it off the vine, and carried it gently to the green lawn.

"Now watch carefully or the baby will run into the house before you see it," said Father, sticking the butcher knife into the pumpkin.

"Don't, don't," cried Florence, "you'll cut the baby."

"I'll be careful," said Father grinning, and slowly cut around the pumpkin as he held it between his knees.

We knew that pumpkins could be changed into a golden carriage for Cinderella by her fairy godmother, so why not a hiding place for babies? We held our breath until we almost choked as we pressed against Father's legs while he cut all around the pumpkin.

Then Father dropped the knife, held the pumpkin together with his hands, and looked up at us. "Ready now, watch!" he said, and let the sides fall apart, but at the same time he threw his legs up in the air, tumbling us in every direction. When we got to our feet, he was pointing at the pumpkin.

"Look, look, the baby's gone," he said.

We looked at the hollow in the pumpkin that was soft and round and empty save for seeds and soft padding, then we swung around and looked at the house. So certain were we that there had been a baby, that for years we swore we had seen it run across the lawn and into the house. And even as we looked we heard a baby's cry.

We yelled and squealed while Father rolled on the grass laughing. Our faces must have been a sight. When he could control his mirth, he took us to the house. And sure enough the baby was there. Grandma had a pink blanket around it, and it was a girl. We spent days arguing over who had seen Anne first, and to this day a pumpkin recalls her birth.

But where was the new baby to come from when our yard wasn't big enough to grow pumpkins? We worried over that for some time. Then we learned that Father was going to leave his Lead church because his leg – that wasn't there – couldn't stand the walking up and down the many steps to do his visiting.

He went away for a week to preach at Arrowhead, Red Elm, and Dupree. When he came back, he said that he had accepted a call to those towns – and had decided at the same time to take up a homestead, and that meant we would

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

be living on a farm of our own.

Mother wept, but we didn't see why. "I'll still be preaching," Father said, and if he was preaching she would still be Mrs. Minister.

"How long?" asked Mother. "If you once start farming, how long?"

"I can preach and farm forever if necessary," said Father.

"'Ye cannot serve God and mammon,'" quoted Mother from the Bible.

Father answered her, saying, "We'll be nearer God's house on the prairie, Molly."

Mother still wept, and we still didn't see why. She should be glad we were going to have a farm of our own where we would have pumpkins for the new baby to grow in.

5

WE AGREED with Father that we were nearer God's house even as we traveled overland to our homestead. During the day the sky seemed to wrap its arms around us and the sun warmed us with its blessings. At night the stars swung low on invisible threads until we were sure we could touch them from the roof of the surrey.

It was Mr. Dent who had lent Father the surrey and bay team with a driver to transport us children. Mother and Father, with Anne between them, rode in a buggy drawn by Dan.

Father had bought the big black horse two weeks before we left Lead. Mackay had employed the last days in earning spending money. He charged every child who came to see us a penny for a ride, while he led Dan around the manse and church yard. He was doing very well until Mother caught him and put an end to his profiteering.

We left the Black Hills behind us, passed through bluff country, then reached the open prairie with its coulees and draws. There new grass shot up green spikes between the crunchy winter grass. We ate by the roadside, rested the horses in the middle of the day, then traveled on into the night until we found a farmer who would take us in.

One night we got lost, then, guided by a distant light, we came to a farmhouse. Father sent Mackay and me to the door to ask if we could have shelter for the night.

Holding tight to my twin's hand, I felt a bouncing bubbly feeling in my stomach as Mackay rapped. We listened. There were slow, shuffling steps on the other side of the thin door. My heart climbed into my throat.

"Who's there?" asked a gruff voice.

I jumped, and blurted. "It's me." Then horrified at the mistake in English, I hurried to correct it. "It is I," I piped up.

The door opened with a creaking sound that sent shivers down my back, and Mackay's hand held mine so tightly that it hurt. Carrying a lamp, a very thin woman with tousled gray hair, and wearing a red kimono, looked out at us.

"A — A w-witch," I stammered, and turned to run. I went headfirst into Father, who had followed us. He picked me up, held me tight, and explained to the witch, who turned out to be a homesteader, that we had got lost. He asked her if Mother and the girls could spend the night in the house.

"We men," he said, and Mackay sidled up to him and stood very straight, "can sleep in the barn."

Reassured, perhaps, by knowing there was a mother with us, the woman consented to let us in, and when she saw Mother and her condition, she couldn't do enough for us.

Later, in retelling the story, Mother always added, "We were never refused hospitality when we traveled overland."

In the morning, before we left the homes that had given us shelter, Father would read the Bible and say a prayer. In this way our homes were linked together by chains of prayer.

On the trip from Lead we were interested in getting to the farm so we could start growing pumpkins for our new baby to grow in.

It was the first of May, and spring was all around us. The warm wind whispered through the old, dried grass in a rus-

tling chorus and the new green grass moved like waving fingers. Prairie dogs stood at their front doors, daring us to catch them, only to turn with a flirt of their tails and disappear if we made a motion their way.

A night the frogs gargled their evening prayers; coyotes sang their lament to the moon; and nighthawks zoomed down on a moonbeam.

The whole world, we children thought, was a song. Geese, with their long necks stretching out like arrows, yak-yakked a journey northward; crows, their wings flashing purple in the sun, cawed overhead; flocks of meadowlarks, with black V's on their yellow breasts, caroled from every hummock or from willows, that gently rocked and their pussy-soft gray buds and uncurled crinkly leaves. And red-breasted robins sang a " cheer-cheer-up " song.

" God's birds," said Father, watching the robins.

" Why? " I asked, guessing that he must know a story about them.

So Father told us how once upon a time the robin was just a little brown bird without his gay, red breast. But when Jesus, God's Son, was on the cross — a crown of thorns cutting into his forehead, the robin flew down and tried to pluck out the thorns.

" In trying to lessen Jesus' pain," said Father, " the robin got his breast red with blood. But God loved the little bird for trying to help Jesus and blessed him. And from that day on all robins have had beautiful red breasts, their badge of kindness."

The world was a song. But Mother didn't sing. She had resigned herself to living on a farm, but there was no happiness in her resignation. With Father it was different. He was as impetuous and alive as the new life around him. He sang as he drove Dan; he sang as we lunched; and he even sang when it rained and we had to pull up oilcloth coverings to keep us from getting wet, and the horses' hoofs went glug-glug in the mud. He sang " Showers of Blessing," a hymn

that was to become his theme song on the farm whenever the sun threatened to dry up the garden or grainfields. If it looked as if the rain clouds were going to sail by, only sprinkling us, we too would raise our voices singing:

"'Showers of blessing,
Showers of blessing we need:
Mercy drops round us are falling,
But for the showers we plead.'"

Mother didn't join in our singing as we traveled. She sat quiet, a sad, faraway look in her hazel eyes. Perhaps it was because she had a new life of her own to think about – the baby.

"You'll feel differently after the event," said Father.

We didn't know what an "event" meant, but we hoped Father was right. One day after we had lunched by a stream and we children went wading, Mother and Father sat on the bank. As I came back to them I heard Father say that having a bit of land of one's own would give the children security and roots.

I knew that flowers, trees, and vegetables had roots. I looked at my feet and wondered if living on a farm would make me grow roots, and I began to think that perhaps Mother was right. Father should stay in town and preach, even if we did have to wear shoes. I hurried to put mine on and sat down beside Mother.

"Does Papa really want us to have security roots?" I asked her.

Mother's lips tilted in a smile and she gave me a quick kiss. "Yes, dear," she said, then looked at Father, "but there are different kinds of security roots." Then she talked to Father about something called spiritual roots, which could be had without becoming a farmer.

Father's face got pink, but he looked at the sky that was as blue as his eyes, and his face took on a thinking look. It was many Sundays later that I heard him preach a sermon

on spiritual roots, and it was about the soul getting roots by doing deeds of kindness and of love no matter where one lived. Yet somehow it seemed important that everyone should have roots of one kind or another.

Finally we reached Dupree, a small prairie town, and we stayed there until after the new baby was born. To our surprise, as the pumpkins weren't even planted yet, we came home from school one afternoon to find a new sister — "Margaret." Mother named her after Father's mother. She was a big baby, and I decided that for her I, not Florence, was going to be the baby minder.

Florence had always been the "little mother" in the family, and the last winter we were in Grandfather LeBeau's house she became a heroine. Mother had gone down to Grandfather's big house to borrow some sugar. The last time she had been out, Mackay and John had run outside in their bare feet to wade in the snow. This time Mother locked the door.

Balked of this mischief, the two older boys, with Innis an admiring audience, went upstairs and began to toss lighted matches down the crack around the stovepipe. Florence tried to stop them, but they kept on until the ceiling paper caught fire. We couldn't get out of the doors and the house was gray with smoke. Finally Florence handed me baby Anne, and made us all stand by the window. Then she broke the glass with a stick of firewood.

"Yell for Uncle Tommy," she said, looking at the splintered edges of glass. "If he doesn't come, we will climb out the window."

We looked at the machine shop down the hill and yelled and screamed at the top of our lungs. Luckily Uncle Tom wasn't pounding out a horseshoe or he would never have heard us. Hear us he did, and came running, followed by other men, and they put out the fire.

"You're a smart little eight-year-old," Florence was told over and over again, "just like the little Dutch boy who

saved his people by holding his fist in the hole in the dike."

I looked at the new baby and decided that someday maybe I would be a heroine and save her – in the meantime she would be my baby, and our homestead would be her first home.

Our homestead was called "Horseshoe Ranch," because the land spread away from the pond in front of the house in two draws that enclosed flat ground in the shape of a horseshoe.

When Mother came out to the farm our house was built. The neighbors had come to a house-raising bee, as they called it. We children liked the house, even though it was just a frame building without partitions. On the inside west wall a stairway led up to the second story, where the beds were separated by curtain walls. It was our very own home and smelled enticingly of new boards and tar paper.

Mother didn't look very happy about the house. "I guess it will do until you've proved up the homestead," she said.

Father started to say something but stopped, and I held out the creamy lilies I'd picked off the alkali patch below the cliff. Mother took them, and Father tossed me to his shoulder.

"I think it is a lovely homestead," I said, and started to add that I hoped we would always live there, when I saw Mother's face. It was the color of the lilies. Then I remembered that she didn't want Father to be a homesteader, so I bit my lip. I wouldn't let Mother see how much I liked it. I wouldn't even let myself like it, I promised, unless I saw her liking it too.

But a promise like that was hard to keep. Our farm was certainly God's garden. He was everywhere. The morning and evening dew were God's crystal beads to give a drink to his thirsting plants, and the rain was his "showers of blessing." The sunsets were painted by God's artists, and so were the rainbow and northern lights. The stars were God's candles, the moon his lamp. The sun was his torch, so that all his

creatures might live. The butterflies were his flying flowers, and the fireflies his flying lanterns.

The soil was also God's. Man needed only to work and plant it so that His rain and sunshine would reap a harvest. In winter the snowflakes were God's stars and even a miracle could be done with them.

"For who but God can wash a black snowflake — one that has been soiled by smoke or under a horse's hoof?" asked Father. "It is God's sun that warms the snowflake, lifts it into the air and back into a cloud. It is God's cool air that sends it back to the earth once again, a crystal snow star."

Even with the cactus God had a lesson for his children. Our cactus caused us a few painful spots — sometimes on our bare feet, and sometimes in our fingers when we tried to pick the red or yellow blossoms or write our names on it with a pin. To our surprise our names did not disappear but stayed on the cactus like an operation scar.

God's cactus lesson gave Father a sermonet. "The cactus blossom is like sin in that sin sometimes seems beautiful. But if you try to grasp sin with greedy hands, you will get hurt. And like the scar of your names on the cactus, there will be a scar on your soul."

Yes, we children loved the farm. We went barefooted, swam in the pond, and later took our baby ducks there to get their swimming lessons. We saw our first field of flax, its blue nodding heads like a rippling lake. We watched our corn patch sprout a batallion of tiny green uniformed soldiers, which under the sun and rain turned into golden-tassled spears above the orange pumpkin chariots. Popcorn, eating corn, and squaw, the latter, when husked, turning into batons of jewels: rubies, sapphires, and amethysts.

We picked our first watermelons, tapping them to see if they were ripe, or cutting out a test cube. While we ate them, rind going from ear to ear, Mother recited the story of the little Negro boy who was punished by his mammy, not for stealing a watermelon, but for stealing one that wasn't ripe.

Our farm harvested new life. Not only did we have a new baby, but our cat had kittens; our dog, pups; our heifers, calves; our horses, colts; and our pigs, a litter. What a wonderful, wonderful world!

We giggled with delight when we saw the colts and calves standing on their wobbly legs, bunting their mothers, to get their milk. And when the runt pig almost died, and was saved only by Mother's bringing it into the house and feeding it with a baby bottle, we all begged to have a turn.

Our life wasn't all play. We worked, though we were still new enough to it to think it was play. We fed the chickens and ducks, the pigs too, and gathered the eggs. In time we learned to milk the cows, first by stripping them, then getting onto the knack of pumping with our fingers. We loved to feed the weaned calves, sticking our fingers into their mouths, and squirming with delight as their rough tongues tickled our fingers. We shoved their heads into the pail and let them suck on our fingers while at the same time they drew up milk. Soon they could drink without our fingers.

We all learned to ride bareback and took turns going after the cows. And of course we were given the weeding job. As Father went ahead with a hoe, either in the corn or potato patch, we would follow him and yank out the weeds the hoe missed. We picked potato bugs too, filling cans with them, which Father would destroy as we didn't like to kill them even if they did eat holes in our potato leaves.

One morning after a big rain Father came in from the garden. He wasn't singing "Showers of Blessing," and he looked very glum.

"What's the matter, George David?" asked Mother.

Father sighed. "The rain has spoiled all our *little* potatoes," he said.

We all looked glum, not seeing the twinkle in Father's eyes. "How?" asked John, his brown eyes serious.

"It's turned them into big, fat potatoes," said Father, his voice still gloomy.

It took us a moment, and a chuckle from Mother, before we saw the joke, which became a rainy-day one for the rest of our farm life.

Father's life was a busy one. He was up at dawn, and often out at work before we children rose. Our morning prayers were skipped, though at night we still had our Bible-reading and prayers.

Father's study was now the outdoors. Sometimes he took sermon notes with him and studied them as he plowed, or paused in weeding to take a peek at them. Sometimes he would pick up a flower, look at it, and get on his thinking look, and sometime in a sermon that flower would be used to illustrate a point. I don't know whether Father ever found "sermons in stones," but he certainly found them in flowers, and often we children unconsciously helped him.

One day Florence found a rosebud hiding under the lowest branch of a wild rosebush. "Oh, look, Papa!" she said. "The little rosebud is hiding from the sun. It won't open up."

Father smiled, but put on his thoughtful look as he knelt with us by the bush to peer at the tiny bit of pink showing. "Don't worry," he said. "God will look after it."

"He mightn't see it," said Florence.

"God's sun will warm the air with its kisses," said Father. "And the rosebud can't steal away from the air. It will blow around her petals, and the sun's rays will bounce from the leaves to the little bud. The raindrops and dew will fall on it and the ground beneath it. The rosebush will draw up the water and the little bud will open and become a lovely rose."

Later I heard Father reading a sermon to Mother and he used the little rosebud to tell how God smiled on his people even when they refused to listen to him and turned their faces away.

Another day I stepped on a flower and I cried, "Poor flower, I didn't mean to hurt you. I'm sorry." I picked it up and noticed how sweetly the flower's perfume came up to me, then I passed it to Father.

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

He held it in his hand and drew a deep breath, and smiled. Then he looked at the sky and sort of talked to himself, as if he were remembering something: "'What is forgiveness?' a deaf mute was asked, and he wrote on a piece of paper, 'Forgiveness is the odor which a flower yields when trampled upon.'" Then he looked back at me. "Don't cry," he said. "The flower's perfume tells you that you are forgiven." This comforted me, and later, when I heard him preaching one day, he told his flock what a Persian poet had said about forgiveness:

"The sandal-tree perfumes when riven
The ax which laid it low;
Let man, who hopes to be forgiven,
Forgive and bless his foe."

Father did not stop at flowers for illustrating a point. He used even the tumbleweed. It grew lush and green during the summer, stole the moisture from other plants, and dried up and died in the fall. Fierce winds tore up its roots and sent it tumbling over the prairie like a black snowball; going hither and thither without any sense of direction, scaring horses and other animals. It seemed a selfish, useless thing.

But even that tumbleweed could be of some good. When the wind blew it against the barbed-wire fence, and the snow came and covered it, making a bank, a lost calf could find shelter from the wind and keep from freezing to death.

"People are like that," Father said. "No matter how bad they are, there is some good in them."

Saturday noon, Father lay aside his homesteader clothes, and became Mr. Minister in action. He washed, shaved, dressed, hitched the driver to the buggy, and set off to either Arrowhead or Red Elm, the other two towns where he preached as well as at Dupree. In the morning he would preach at one of these towns, then come back to Dupree for the evening service. It would be late Sunday night when he got home, and sometimes, if there was a funeral or a

wedding, he would not get back until Monday evening. Until we children learned how to milk, a neighbor boy came over to do the Sunday milking.

Sometimes Father went to the home of the bride for a wedding. One day he was late getting started as Dan was playing coltish and every time Mackay and I would get near his head to shake the pan of grain to coax him within mane grasp, he would back up, fling up his heels, and gallop off. Finally we caught him and Father set out. He decided to take a short cut, miss the bridge over the rain-swollen stream, and ford it.

The first thing he knew Dan was swimming and the water was up to the seat of the buggy. By the time he got across his pants were wet to the hips. They were still soaked when he performed the wedding ceremony.

"I was dripping all over the place," he told Mother, "and the bride giggled through the service."

We giggled too when we heard about it.

6

WE SOON DISCOVERED that we were just one of many homesteaders in Father's " garden." There were lawyers, doctors, schoolteachers, old maids, bachelors, poets, an artist, widows, divorcees, people from foreign lands, regular farmers, and a deaf and dumb couple who had two children who could talk.

All these people were taking the opportunity of owning a bit of the United States by staking out claims, which they had only to live on for six months of three years, put up some buildings, break the sod, or raise cattle. We met them all at our first picnic.

Dressed, as no country children had ever dressed, in white, tucked, embroidered dresses, satin ribbons on our fresh curls; the boys in light cotton suits, stiff collars, and wearing tiny caps, we started for the picnic.

When we reached the picnic grounds under a few straggly cottonwoods by a stream, it was easy to see that we were the minister's kids. The other children were barefooted, in cotton dresses or overalls. There was a man there with a camera and Mother lined us up for a picture, which she later sent to Aunt Lydia, writing on the back: " This is not good, for the children had been all day at the picnic and were tired, and

the sun was shining in their eyes. Florence had sore lips from the wind, but she says she doesn't care for Aunty knows what she looks like. Doesn't the baby look sweet sleeping? She slept all day. This is not near so good of Anne either. Mackay wondered if you would notice the button off his blouse."

This must have been motherly pride, for looking at the picture now it seems as if we must have sat around all day keeping clean and tidy just in order to have our picture taken.

One of the things that I remember of that day is the food. The makeshift tables were loaded with sandwiches, salads, cookies, doughnuts, pies, fried chicken, and under them were freezers of home-made ice cream. I was so full I couldn't eat another bite and was watching a homesteader eating his fifth piece of pie. Suddenly a piece toppled off his fork. Unconscious of the loss, the homesteader opened his mouth and stuck in the empty fork. The look of surprise on his face was so funny that I giggled until I almost choked.

Of course there were races: three-legged ones; gunny-sack races; and an egg race in which the contestants had to pick up an egg on a spoon, then run with it to the goal and not let the egg fall. There were horse races too, and the pinto ponies ran as if they were pursued by Sioux warriors.

We made friends with the other children and our parents got acquainted with the grownups. Before the day was over Mother had promised to start a Sunday school at our house for the children who lived too far away from Dupree to go to church.

"You can write for Sunday school papers and cards," she told Father on the way home.

"Molly, you darling," he said, using her pet name. "I knew you'd find a way to be happy on the farm." He put his arm around her.

"Oh, you did, did you?" Mother's voice sounded tart, but she put her head on his shoulder.

Father wrote for the papers the very next day. As soon as

they arrived, Mother started her Sunday school. Mother played the organ while we sang. Then she taught the lesson and gave the little children pretty cards, the older ones story papers. Afterward we played outside until a picnic lunch of cookies and milk, or lemonade, was served.

There was one couple who never missed a Sunday: Mr. and Mrs. Lorne, who brought their boy and girl. They talked to each other and to the children on their fingers. Mrs. Lorne was thin, short, with soft brown curls around her forehead. Her blue eyes were always open wide and they seemed to be watching our mouths. We asked Mother why.

"It's so that she can read your lips," said Mother.

We thought she was joking until she showed us that by speaking very slowly, and pronouncing our words carefully, we could help another person tell what we were saying. We held our fingers in our ears and tried it — without much success.

Mr. Lorne was tall and fair, and his eyes were blue too. They had both gone to the same school for the deaf and had fallen in love. Mr. Lorne couldn't keep a job because of his affliction, so he had taken a homestead.

"Why can the children talk?" we asked Mother.

"Mrs. Lorne sends them to her parents for part of each year," explained Mother, then asked us how we would like to talk on our fingers like the Lornes.

We thought it would be fun, and for weeks we practiced every word we could spell. We never did get very good at it, but Mother became an expert, even better than Father.

During our second summer on the farm Mrs. Lorne had another baby. In the middle of the night, when Father was away, Mr. Lorne knocked on our door. Talking on his fingers, he told Mother that the baby was coming and the doctor was out on another case. He wanted Mother to take his horse, Lady, and ride back to stay with his wife until he could bring the doctor.

Mother had ridden sidesaddle in Ontario, but she had

never ridden our horses. However, she gathered up some clean cloths, put on a wide skirt, and, giving Florence instructions to look after us, mounted Lady and set off on a four-mile ride.

It was a ride of terror for her. Thunderheads were piling up in the sky and forked lightning cut through the night, and the wind whipped her skirts about. She clung to the saddle horn with one hand, and the reins with the other, and prayed that she would get there in time.

"If I'd had to get off Lady to open any gates, I'd never have been able to get on again," she told us.

Luckily Mr. Lorne had left the gates open, and she reached his house and got inside just as the rain came down.

The children were sleeping and Mrs. Lorne had the kettle boiling on the stove. She was lying on a bed writhing with pain. Quickly Mother slid out of her jacket, washed her hands, and set to work. She had never been a midwife herself, but she'd had five of her seven children without a doctor, with only the help of other women, so she knew what to do.

The birth was slow and Mrs. Lorne was suffering. She clung to Mother's hands until Mother thought she would break her fingers. So mother tied a rope to the top of the bed and told Mrs. Lorne to pull on it every time she felt a pain. She also gave her a piece of wood to bite on.

"What – what's keeping the doctor and my husband?" Mrs. Lorne let go the rope to finger talk.

"The doctor was away and your husband had to take one of our horses to go back for him," Mother's fingers replied. "They'll be here soon."

But they weren't, and the baby was born, washed, and wrapped in a blanket, and Mrs. Lorne and Mother were having a cup of tea, before the doctor and Mr. Lorne arrived, soaking wet.

"Well, well," the doctor said, examining the baby, then his mother. "There was no need to bring me out at all."

"There might have been," said Mother, and she was cross. "It's just lucky we didn't need you."

Mrs. Lorne suddenly tried to sit up and her fingers were moving.

"What does she say?" asked the doctor.

"She's wondering if the baby will be deaf and mute."

"He cried, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Mother, and told Mrs. Lorne so in the finger language.

"Can he hear?" asked Mrs. Lorne's fingers.

Mother repeated it to the doctor, and he told Mother to hold the baby close to the stove. He then picked up a flat-iron and banged it on the stove. The baby jumped in Mother's arms and screwed up his face and began to cry. Mother laughed and carried him over so that Mrs. Lorne could see his mouth crying. Then she finger talked, telling her the baby could hear too. A happy smile spread over Mrs. Lorne's face and she reached for her husband's hand. Holding it, she shut her eyes and went to sleep.

The first thing we asked Mother when she came riding back on Lady was, "Can the baby talk?"

"Not yet," said Mother laughing, "but he can learn."

For the next two weeks Mother rode back each day to spend a couple of hours with Mrs. Lorne. She bathed her and the baby, did some baking for the children, then rode home to take up her own work as a homesteader's wife and Mrs. Minister.

Mother didn't like the farm, but she made the best of it. To her it was desolate prairie, not like the Ontario farm, with its spreading maple trees where the cattle could rest in the shade. Here the only shade came from buildings or the edges of the draws. Here there was no clear running stream bordered by violets – just our muddy pond, cactus blooms, and the alkali patches that after a rain we loved to race over, leaving the imprint of our bare feet. Sometimes Papa would catch her wiping tears from her eyes with the corner of her apron.

"Please, Molly," he'd say, putting his arms around her. "Don't fret. You'll learn to love the farm. Just give it a chance."

"Sometimes I'd give anything just to see our apple tree in bloom," she'd say, leaning her head on Father's shoulder.

"It was a beauty," said Papa, hugging her. "I can remember the first time I kissed you under it. You were prettier than any blossom."

Mother laughed, the tears in her eyes shining. "You — you and your blarney," she said, and pushed him away from her. "Go on back to your work and — watch out for rattlesnakes."

Mother never got over her fear of rattlesnakes. She was sure, every time we left the house, that one of us would be bitten. We never were, though we did see them, and even killed them. In our third year there I remember Anne and I were on Snowball's back. We had a tin pail with us, and when we saw the rattlesnake, we got off and threw the pail at it until we stunned it. Then we finished it off with a stick. Then, wonders of wonders, several little baby rattlers seemed to jump out of its mouth and we killed them too. We used the tin pail to cut off the rattles, and this one had ten rattles, showing that it was ten years old. Mother kept it for years as being the oldest rattler killed by our family, and I never got over feeling that I'd been a heroine. Perhaps I had saved someone's life.

Another time I backed out of our door, trying to get it shut before baby Margaret could follow me. I stepped on a writhing mass of snake. I jumped, held my hand, and screamed, and Mother ran out. She saw the snake, grabbed a stick, and killed it; then, seeing me hold my hand, still hysterical, she almost fainted. I hadn't been bitten, and the snake turned out to be a bull snake, which we never killed as it was known to kill rattlers.

In the fall Father always put a sod bank around our house to keep it warm for winter. One warm day before the snow came, we saw a small rattler going for a stroll on our bank.

We promptly sent it to rattler heaven.

Another time, as we sat in the shade of the house, Father saw one of our hens standing as if petrified. He sent Mackay and me over to see what was the matter. We ran over, then we too stood petrified. There was a big rattler coiled into a ball, its rattles shaking as it stared at the hen, hypnotizing it. Father saw us stuck in our tracks, and he came over, rescuing the egg-laying hen, to say nothing about the twins.

Mother was afraid of electric storms too. But we weren't. As soon as one started, the three boys would climb to the roof of the house, where the electrified air made their hair stand on end. Our parents put an end to their acting as lightning rods.

Once when Innis, seven years old then, and Father were away with the wagon and team a storm came up. The sky grew so black that they got off the road and were lost. The horses were going in a circle and straining in the harness as the muddy ground clung to the wheels. Finally Father decided to unhitch the horses, mount them, and look for the road.

Lightning flashed all around them as they rode off looking for the road, and finally they found it. But when they tried to find the wagon, it was lost.

"It – it's to our right, Papa," stammered Innis.

"I don't think so," said Father, "but watch for another flash of light."

The lightning forked overhead and Father looked to the left, Innis to the right. "I – it's there, Papa," he screamed, pointing. "I – I saw it."

Still Father wasn't sure, but the next flash showed the wagon to the right, and they rode back and brought it to the road.

For days Innis boasted about how he found the wagon, and Father admitted that, even at seven, Innis had an uncanny sense of direction. Later it was to save not only his life but mine.

The cyclones, I think, frightened Mother more than anything except the rattlers. Many a trip we made to the cellar to sit shivering with fear lest at any moment our house would rise and fly through the air like a gigantic bird. We had been told stories of how cradles in which babies were sleeping had been carried off by a cyclone, only to be found miles away with the baby still asleep with his thumb in his mouth.

But we did see one cyclone. A greenish-brown cloud appeared in the sky, turning blacker and blacker. Suddenly it took the shape of a funnel, its spout like a coyote's nose smelling along the ground. The air where we were, a half mile away, was motionless. But, even as we watched, the cyclone picked up the neighbors' house and twisted it into kindling. Luckily they were away and no one was killed. That one was called a baby cyclone!

But for years after we left the farm Mother would make us go to the cellar whenever there was a windstorm. Surprisingly, we are not afraid of storms now. Perhaps it is because we feared the darkness of the cellar more than we did the wind.

No, Mother didn't like the farm, but she adapted herself. She was still Mrs. Minister, and she still had her job to do as a minister's wife. The Sunday school was not only her own idea, but became her joy. She was determined that those children of women like herself, who were there because their husbands loved the land and were seeking security for their children, should have security of the spirit too.

We got to know a lot of people at Mother's Sunday school. There was Mrs. Sparrow, a weepy-looking woman, and her daughter Hermione, who was a big girl in her teens.

"Where is Mr. Sparrow?" Florence asked. "Is he dead?"

"No," said Mother. "He just doesn't live with them."

"Is he a traveler?" asked Mackay, who had heard of such men who spent most of their time away from home.

"I don't think so," evaded Mother.

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Then why doesn't he live with them?" I asked.

"Some married people aren't happy together," said Mother, picking up her darning. "And now run along and forget it."

We couldn't forget it. How could married people be happy not living together? Mother wasn't when Father was away. That gave me an idea.

"Is Mr. Sparrow a student minister like Papa was?" I asked.

Mother put a hand up to her mouth, but not before I saw her smile, and I repeated my question.

"No, he isn't like Papa," she said. "He's divorced."

Then she did send us outside, and it wasn't until years later that I knew what divorced meant, and it explained why Mrs. Sparrow had a weepy look about her, and why she wouldn't let Hermione go out with the boys.

Then there was the Marble family. Mr. and Mrs Marble always looked as if they worked night and day, and I guess they had to as they had even more children than we did. Ten in all and hardly enough clothes to go around, to say nothing about food, as Mrs. Marble told Mother.

After one Sunday school class at which we had sung "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam," Tommy Marble, age six, said he wasn't going home.

"You must, Tommy," said his mother.

"I can't," said Tommy eating a cooky, and holding another one in his hand.

"Why, Tommy?" asked Mrs. Marble.

"Because Jesus wants me for a sunbeam," he replied.

It took a bit of coaxing, and a few more cookies, before he was convinced that he could be a sunbeam for Jesus at home as well as at our place.

The Bohemian family across the road from us came to our Sunday school too. They were a fat, jolly family. Mrs. Litka had a round, pretty face, and a body like a dumpling tied in the middle. Mr. Litka was a big, wide-shouldered man, and his moustache was black and long. They had the cleanest

house we were ever in, and it always smelled of good food.

Tina and Alex Litka became our regular playmates and took us to their Indian mound to look for Indian relics. We dug for hours, hoping to find scalping knives, tomahawks, and beaded clothes, but all we ever found were arrows.

It was Tina who later sent Innis into a rage which didn't cool until he had his revenge. When we weren't playing at being farmers, we had our wild pets: birds, frogs, rabbits, and even a garter snake. We made our own games too, the boys being Indians with the bows and arrows Mackay had made. Sometimes they tied Anne to a tree, then chased each other around shooting arrows until one of them rescued her.

They also became William Tells, Mackay and John putting paper caps on their heads and then shooting them off. Once Mackay missed John's cap and nicked him in the cheek. But it was Innis' bow that caused the trouble. It was as tall as he was and the best of them all, according to him. He even wanted to sleep with it. Then one day Tina took it and stretched it so far, shooting an arrow, that she broke it.

Innis was in tears, and he would have scalped her. But she ran, taking refuge in our privy and locking the door on him. Innis stood there, his chubby stomach quivering with rage. Then he raced for the box that held his pet garter snake. Holding it squirming in his hands, he raced back to the small building, which was well aired with knotholes. He stuck the head of the snake through a knothole and pushed it in, at the same time shouting, " Rattlesnake, rattlesnake! "

Tina let out a shriek and the door flew open and she staggered out, tripped on her lowered bloomers, and fell headlong in the dirt. Laughing now, Innis went to rescue his pet.

We had other visitors on weekdays. There was one bachelor, John Brown, who lived in a sod shack on a farm next to Miss Singleton, who, the women told Mother, was a " disappointed old maid, who had been left at the church steps."

John Brown was tall and loose-jointed, with big hands and feet. He always wore overalls that had holes in them.

Sometimes he stopped on his way from town and had supper with us.

"Does a fellow good, Ma'am," he'd say to Mother, "to get a woman-cooked meal."

"You should get married," said Mother, then flushed as Father grinned at her because he was always teasing her about matchmaking so that people would get married and she would have the wedding fee.

"I was thinkin' on it," John Brown replied, "but the ones I want don't want me, and the ones that want me, Old Nick himself wouldn't want."

Father threw back his head and laughed, then, sobering, he asked: "Have you tried courting Miss Singleton? She's a fine cook."

"She's kinda uppity," said Mr. Brown, shrugging. "I fear she'd have none o' me."

"'Faint heart ne'er won fair lady,'" said Father, and I pondered over that, even when we went outside and sat around our smudge of grass and twigs in an old pail full of holes. We used many a smudge fire to keep the mosquitoes from biting us. The talk turned to mosquitoes, and John Brown pulled his pipe from his pocket.

"These here mosquitoes ain't nothin' compared to the ones we had when I first came here," he said.

"That so?" remarked Father.

"No, Sir, they ain't. The first year here I was almost eaten alive. One night I remember in perticular. I'd been abuildin' a pigsty and was asettin' down to have a smoke on this here corncob, when a cloud o' vicious-lookin' critters flew toward me. I took one look at them and ran fer the iron kettle that some greenhorn from the East had brought here, athinkin' he would do some maple sirup boilin'. Ha-ha! Wal, as I was asayin', I crawled under the kettle and I couldn't keep from alaughin' as I heard those durn mosquitoes, beggin' your pardon, Reverend, buzzin' outside.

"The blawsted things sounded like a sawin' machine and

they made me sleepy. So I dozed off. I was wakened by somethin' scratchin' my back. I sat up and, sufferin' snakes, that thar kettle was full o' holes, bored by those durn critters, and in each hole was a stinger the size of a corkscrew, and they was aborin' closer and closer to me.

"I thought that any minute I would be stuck on all sides, so I took me hammer, which was still in me back pocket, and clinched every durn stinger into the kettle. That'll fix them, I thought. But, jumpin' jack rabbits, the kettle was lifted clean off o' me and the critters flew off with it, and even when I went alookin' for it, I niver did find it." He finished with a grin and winked at Father.

But for days afterward we children talked about John Brown's mosquitoes, and we watched for the black kettle every time we went for a walk or ride. Needless to say, we never found it, and soon became, at least partly, mosquito-conditioned, though we continued to put newspaper between our bare legs and our stockings when we rode horseback.

7

MOTHER MIGHT NOT have been a farmer, but she was certainly a good cook. Our house was always fragrant with big batches of bread, cookies, or cakes, and she learned to make butter.

We had a churn with a dasher that we children pumped up and down, anxiously waiting for the plunk-plunk sound that told us the cream had turned to buttermilk and butter. Then we would lift the lid and peer in to see if there was a frog sitting on the golden islands of butter as in the fairy story. Much to our disappointment, we never found one.

At this stage Mother took over, lifting the butter out into a wooden bowl of cold water. She worked it with a wooden ladle until all the buttermilk was out, then added salt and put the butter into an oblong mold that had a leaf pattern on the bottom. When the butter came out, the leaf was printed on it.

On the farm we ate jack rabbits for the first time. Father took his rifle and went hunting for them. When he brought one back, he would skin and cut it up, and Mother would soak it in salty water to take away the wild taste. If she was going to roast our rabbit, she would put an onion in with it. This too was supposed to make it taste tame.

Sometimes she would pot-roast it until tender, then roll the pieces in egg and bread crumbs and fry them in butter. Another time she would make a stew with dumplings. But no matter how she cooked it we were always glad when Father went hunting, "to get a little rabbit skin to wrap our Baby Bunting in," though we never did wrap Margaret in the skins.

During the first summer we ate so many dried apples and prunes that it was wonderful when fall came and Mother canned squash and pumpkin, and made citron preserves. Then there was always the rare treat of bought jams, and corn sirup, to say nothing about the maple sirup Father's brothers sent from Ontario to put on the corn bread, like Lincoln used to eat.

Mother had her garden too — a flower garden. She planted pansies, petunias, sweet peas, morning-glories, geraniums, and mignonette. One evening after we had carried water from the pond for her flowers, she told us a story about the mignonette, as we sat smelling its sweet fragrance:

"Once upon a time there lived a king and queen and a beautiful princess. The princess was so sweet and kind to everyone that people forgot how beautiful she was and only talked about her goodness.

"The princess had long golden curls, which the maid combed, and no matter how the maid pulled at the tangles the princess never cried. Neither did she cry when her parents had to go away on trips. In fact, she was so good that the queen of the fairies heard about her and decided to reward her. So she set off for the palace.

"'I have come to tell you,' the fairy said to the princess, 'that I have heard of your beauty and kindness and I have come to reward you. You may choose from these three wishes. First, you may be a bird to go from one end of the earth to the other singing sweet songs. Or you may be a butterfly, with not a care in the world save to be gay, happy, beautiful, and charm those who see you flitting about. Or you may be

a flower, with perfume so sweet that it will cheer the unhappy, soothe the ill, and be a cheerful companion to all.'

"The princess thought about the wishes; then she said: 'If I were a bird, I might fly too far from my home and friends, and forget to come home, so I will not be a bird. If I were a butterfly, I might think more of my own pleasure and forget to make others happy, so I will not be a butterfly. So I will be a flower to help and comfort those who need help and comfort.'

"Smiling, the fairy queen waved her wand, and the kind, beautiful princess turned into the flower mignonette."

When Mother finished, we begged for more flower stories, but she went inside and watered the star-of-Bethlehem hanging in a pot in the window, its starlike flowers peeping through the green leaves.

"Not now," she said, "but soon we'll have a Flower Sunday, and I will tell flower stories to all the children."

When Father heard of her idea, he liked it so well that he decided to make his sermon a flower one too, and between the two of them they found the stories. I've never seen the ones they told us that day, so perhaps they made some of them up.

They both took the Sunday text from The Song of Solomon: "The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come."

Mother looked at the Sunday school children, each one holding either a real flower or one that she had painted, and said, "I like to think that flowers are the alphabet of the angels, with which they write of God's love on our earth."

Then she told us stories, the first one about a queen, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. She was so kind to the poor that she often let her own household go hungry. One day her husband, the king, found her going out with her apron filled with something heavy and asked her what she was carrying. "Only flowers, my lord," said Elizabeth.

"Let me see them," said the king.

The queen hesitated, then opened her apron, and there, as she had said, were flowers. God had turned the bread into flowers.

Only later did I wonder if God approved of telling a lie if it was for a good cause. Then I thought the story sounded like a miracle and I knew what a miracle was because Father had explained it.

"Anything that is good and we do not understand but think that only God could make it happen is a miracle," he had said.

So I was sure that only God could have turned the bread into flowers for the queen.

I stopped thinking about it and listened to Mother who was telling how the flowers got their names. "A long time ago when people saw a little flower with a yellow center surrounded by white petals, they thought it looked like the sun. They named it 'the day's eye,' which in time changed to 'daisy,' which means the sun.

"Another flower reminds people of sweet thoughts, so they called it 'pansy,' which means thoughts.

"The dandelion received its name because its long, sharp leaves are like the teeth of a lion; and the word 'dandelion' means 'lion's tooth.'"

Then showing us pictures of flowers that we hadn't found on the prairie Mother told us that tulips were named by people who wore bright turbans, so they named the flowers "tulips," which meant "turbans." An "aster" means "a star," and an "iris" means a "rainbow."

We held our breath in excitement when Mother told us the legend of the goldenrod and aster. For it was about two little girls who lived at the foot of a big hill, on top of which lived an old woman who could turn people into anything she liked.

One day the two little girls — one, with long golden curls, called Golden Hair; the other, with eyes as blue as the sky, called Blue Eyes — started hand in hand up the hill. It was

a steep hill, and they stopped to rest under an oak. While resting, they made baskets from the oak leaves and filled them with berries to give to the old woman. Then on up the hill they went, stopping once in a while to chase a squirrel or a butterfly. The sun went down and the stars peeked through the curtain of night. Finally they came to a gate and there was the old woman, and she looked very big and fierce.

" We have come to you for help," said Golden Hair smiling, though her voice quivered. " We want you to change us into something that will make everyone happy."

" But we want to stay together forever," added Blue Eyes. " Please let us."

The old woman opened her gate and motioned to the two little girls to come in. And there was a queer, magic smile on her lips, because there was magic in her heart.

The little girls followed her, and no one ever saw them again. But next morning the green grass on the hillside was covered with waving, yellow goldenrod, and tall purple asters.

And the story went on to say that on moonlight nights the old woman walked among the goldenrod and asters, still smiling her magic smile. " I'm sure she knows what happened to the two little girls," the people said.

The goldenrod and the aster nodded at each other. " She gave us our wish," whispered Goldenrod.

" We'll never be parted," replied Aster, " for wherever you grow, there too will I grow."

I liked the story but I wasn't sure that I wanted to be a flower, even to get roots. But I decided that it would be better than to be changed into a frog or snake. So did the other homesteaders' children.

We got to know other homesteaders as well as those who come to Mother's Sunday school. We went visiting, usually on days when the rain had left the ground too wet to work. We children would take turns going with our parents.

I was with them the day we set out to visit Mrs. Jones. I sat on a box at Mother's knee and I kept watching the road for rattlesnakes, and only half listened to Father telling Mother that Mrs. Jones had gone to college, then married a poet, who became a homesteader.

When I saw Mrs. Jones, I didn't think she looked like the college ladies I'd seen. Her brown hair was mussy, and a dirty apron covered her long skirt which clung around her skinny legs. She didn't seem to want to invite us into her house, and when she did I knew why. Mother too hated anyone to visit her if her dishes were dirty, and Mrs. Jones's dishes looked as if she hadn't washed them for a week. Her house was all mussy too, even though she didn't have any children.

We were there a little while and Father had gone to the barn to find Mr. Jones, when Mother felt ill. Mrs. Jones pushed some clothes and books off the bed and Mother lay down. After she put the kettle on to make tea, I helped her with the dishes. She seemed awfully quiet, so I started to tell her about Grandpa and Grandma LeBeau's house. I told her about my great-grandmother running away to get married, then about Granny's parlor, with its stuffed chairs, organ, rugs, photos, and sea shell.

Mrs. Jones did a funny thing. She started to cry, and stopped right in the middle of the dishes and ran outside. Mother went after her. I didn't know what to do, so I kept on at the dishes. Soon Mother came in and said we were going home.

All the way back I wanted to ask Mother why Mrs. Jones had cried, but she looked as if she might be going to cry too.

"That's what happens to a woman when she isn't fitted for the life she has to live," said Mother, when we were almost home.

"Nonsense," said Father in his pulpit voice. "She's just lazy. Look at Mrs. Litka's home. Mrs. Jones has just as much to work with."

Mother tossed her head, but I thought Father was right.

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mrs. Litka's home didn't have any more in it than Mrs. Jones's, yet it was always clean and smelled nice from baking.

"They're not the same," replied Mother. "Mrs. Litka loves the farm and knows the work. Mrs. Jones is like a square peg in a round hole. She remembers happier days and her dreams of being a teacher."

"She's very foolish," said Father, "and she didn't have to marry a homesteader, did she?"

"She married a poet," retorted Mother, "just as I married a minister."

Father had no answer for that, but the next day I found a round hole and tried to put a square stick in it. It wouldn't fit. I got angry and threw it away. Then I picked it up and went to Mother who was feeding the chickens.

"Why won't it fit?" I asked.

"Because it wasn't meant to," said Mother, a sob in her voice.

I saw that she was looking over at Father, who was trying to fix the plow with the boys watching him, and I remembered how she felt about Father's becoming a farmer. The sun was shining on his yellow hair, and I wanted to go and sit on the plow and talk to him, but the way Mother looked I decided to help her feed the chickens. I didn't like to see Mother unhappy; it gave me a choky feeling in my throat.

Another day Mackay and I went with Father to visit his flock. It had rained all night, but the sun was hot. Mother had put on my best white dress and a pink bow on my curls. I thought I looked pretty nice, and Mackay did too in his Sunday clothes. Father should be proud of us, I decided, but he pushed his hat back on his hair, hooked the reins over the dashboard, and studied his sermon. Sometimes he talked out loud, and I heard enough to know it was about Jesus telling Peter that he could walk on the sea if he had enough faith.

I thought a bit about it as I got down off the seat and leaned over the dashboard to catch a glimpse of myself in the puddles. Mackay got down beside me to get the reins and pushed against me, and I fell out of the buggy and into a puddle.

I heard Father shouting, "Whoa," then the horse stopped and Father jumped out and picked me up. Mackay saw me dripping mud and water and started to laugh.

"You look like a spotted calf," he said.

"You pushed me," I cried, and tears began to flow.

"I didn't," he said. "I was just going to drive."

Father didn't laugh, not out loud, but his eyes had sparkles in them. "Perhaps it was an accident," he said, dabbing the mud off my dress with his clean handkerchief.

"He – did it on purpose," I insisted.

"Now, now," said Father, sitting me back in the buggy. "Forget it, and Mamma will wash your dress."

The thought didn't comfort me much as we continued on our way to Miss Singleton's farm. When we got there, my dress was dry, and Miss Singleton took us up her swept path, past her white-scrubbed steps, into the parlor. It was the nicest homestead parlor I had seen, with everything shining and bright. She sat us down on chairs and took a straight-backed one herself. Then she patted her hair, though I didn't see that it needed it as it was pulled back straight from her narrow face which had big black eyes and eyebrows. Her mouth was thin-like, as if she kept her lips pressed tight, but when she smiled her lips tilted at the corners.

She talked to Father and I didn't listen much, just looked at Mackay, then at the organ, the white curtains, the lace doilies, and the beaded frames holding pictures of people hanging on her flowered-paper walls.

"That is one of me," she said, pointing to a photo of a pretty girl. "I was about your age then."

I opened my mouth, then shut it tight like hers. How could the thin woman with the high, squeaky voice, tight hair, and

thin lips be the fat little girl with the smile and curls? Would I turn out like she had too, I wondered? The thought was too much. I wanted to go home.

But Father was asking Miss Singleton to sing. I wished he wouldn't, as I had heard her once at our Sunday school and her voice was like a buzz saw. Father seemed not to know about it.

"I'll be glad to," Miss Singleton said, and swished over to the organ and whirled the stool up. Then she sat down facing Father. "First, I must tell you how I became a singer," she said, and Father smiled. "It was almost a miracle."

I listened to her then too. The Bible had miracles, and perhaps it had this one too, and Father had missed it. Then I heard Miss Singleton put into words my greatest wish.

"I always wanted to sing, but though I worked at it, it wasn't really singing," she said. "Not until the night of my dream. Then angels surrounded me, a whole cloud of them. A voice rose from their midst saying, 'Sing, my child, sing.' I obeyed and sang, the angel choir accompanying me." Miss Singleton stopped with a quivery laugh, and for a moment I glimpsed the little girl in her face.

"What happened next?" I asked.

She smiled at me. "In the morning I forgot my dream, but that afternoon I remembered it. I heard the voice bidding me to sing, and I opened my mouth and sang a hymn of praise, and I've done so every day since."

She swung the stool around, her fingers pressed the organ keys, and her knees went up and down as she pumped in air. Papa leaned back in his chair and shut his eyes as she sang in a high, piercing voice. I watched his face, but I couldn't tell how he liked it. Then I looked at Mackay. He was making faces at me and his fingers were in his ears. I giggled, and Father opened his eyes and gave us a stern look, and we didn't move an eyelash until Miss Singleton finished her song.

"Thank you," said Father; then he stood up before she

could sing another song. "Now we must go along and visit Mr. Brown."

"But not before tea," said Miss Singleton, and hurried to bring out cookies, cake, and cold milk. When we were leaving she wrapped up half a cake to take to Mr. Brown. "The poor man must get tired of store food," she said.

"He'll certainly enjoy this cake," said Father, and I knew he meant it too, since it was almost as good as the ones Mother made.

When we drove into Mr. Brown's yard, we saw him coming from the barn. He was so tall and thin that his clothes flapped around him like a scarecrow's. Father asked him about his crops; then we all went to the barn to see the baby pigs. We also saw a dozen kittens.

"You kids take one," he said, and I picked out a white one and Mackay, a black one. Then we went to his sod shack and Father gave him Miss Singleton's cake.

"Mighty kind o' her," he said, taking a quick look at Miss Singleton's house, a half mile away.

"Bit lonesome for her over there," said Father, his eyes twinkling; "you might go over and tell her how you enjoy it."

"May at that," said Mr. Brown, then brought a chair outside for Father to sit on. We sat on the steps and played with the kittens and didn't listen much until Father said, "I heard you were a phrenologist, Mr. Brown."

Mr. Brown shrugged. "Used to do a bit of head-reading but I'm getting out of practice."

"Might practice up on the twins," said Father, grinning.

Quivering with excitement, I found myself sitting on a stool while Mr. Brown's long, none too clean fingers rumpled my hair to find out what I would be like when I grew up. It seemed I had a good-sized love bump, and that was all right as I certainly liked people, even loved most of them.

"Someday you'll be a great mathematician," Mr. Brown said suddenly, and I perked up. I never did see any sense in numbers, and my arithmetic answers never agreed with

the teacher's. Besides, I was always running out of fingers and toes to do my adding with. So I decided that Mr. Brown was joking.

Then when he told Mackay that he had a very big curious bump, and that someday he would be a writer, I was sure he had got our heads mixed. I was the one who wanted to tell stories, and Mackay was the mathematician in our family. Many years later he even wrote a textbook, and I was the one who wrote stories.

On the way home, as I held my kitten and thought about trying to see if I could work Miss Singleton's miracle and become a singer, we had an adventure. A coiled rattler hissed at us from the middle of the road. Our horse balked, and started to back up.

"Whoa! whoa!" shouted Father, and handed Mackay the reins. Taking the whip, he jumped out of the buggy. I shut my eyes and clung to my kitten. When I opened them, the snake was dead, and Father was cutting off the rattles. There were nine rattles, showing that the snake was nine years old.

That night I went to bed with my kitten in a box beside me, and when I said my prayers, I asked for Miss Singleton's dream. The next morning I couldn't remember any dreams of angel choirs, but I stood in front of the mirror and tried out my voice. Nothing save discordant sounds came from my red lips, even though I opened them so wide I could see my tonsils. I decided that it would take more than a few prayers to make a miracle that would turn me into a singer, so I gave up the idea.

Another family we used to visit was the Cushions at Arrowhead. Mr. and Mrs. Cushion were the tiniest married couple I had ever seen and they had four tiny children. "How are the little Cushions today?" Father would always ask as soon as we arrived, and the four little Cushions would be all over him.

Mrs. Cushion was like a doll and could sing like a bird. "Billy Boy" was my favorite song. Enchanted, I would lis-

ten to all the stanzas and never tire of the climax when Billy Boy's girl turned out to be his grandmother. "Twice six, twice seven, twice twenty and eleven," was to me the only exciting arithmetic sum I knew.

Another girl who came to our Sunday school fascinated us in that she was determined to learn to play the organ even though she didn't have one to practice on. She was twelve, and had white skin and long black braids. Her eyes were deep blue and she never smiled. She took music lessons in Dupree, then did her practicing on a paper chart, and sometimes at our house. We were a bit in awe of her, also a bit resentful because our parents always held her up as a good example of industry.

"If a girl can learn to play music on a chart," Mother would say, "you should be able to play, with an organ."

Another family that fascinated me was the artist, his wife, son, and cat. The cat was fed as carefully as a baby, having a special diet and dishes. And all he did was to curl up in the sunny window, swat at flies, or sleep. But the artist would spend hours showing me his paintings and scrapbooks, and he gave me one filled with sketches of deer, ponies, rabbits, and wild flowers. He taught me really to see things in color. I even dream in color, contrary to the belief, by some, that we dream in black and white.

"Why does he homestead when he can paint pictures?" I asked Mother, and learned that he had only one lung, and had to live out of doors, so he took a homestead. Not that he worked it much, but he kept chickens and sold eggs.

We often had visitors from Dupree, and one Saturday three girls came with their parents. While Mother entertained the women, Florence and I entertained the girls. We took them upstairs and dressed up in Mother's clothes. It was the year of the hobble skirts and Mother's, which were just modestly hobbled, became more so under our nimble fingers.

We had only three hats, but the older girls persuaded me

that I would look better in a veil. So, crowned and hobbled, we went downstairs to show off. Our mothers became almost hysterical with laughing. One of them took our picture. She probably realized that it was the sort of picture to keep, so that our children could laugh at us, or use it as an argument to get our clothes to dress up in.

8

WE HAD NIGHT VISITORS on the farm too: sometimes brides who wanted to get married; sometimes a message that someone was sick and wanted Mother. One night when Father didn't get home from preaching and the neighbor hadn't come over to milk the cow, I was in bed with Mother. She was sound asleep, but I was watching the moonlight coming through the window and remembering the story she had told in Sunday school. It was a beautiful story of a poor man who had a vision. In it he saw Christ, the Master, who told him that he would come to his home the next day.

The poor man was happy, and the next day, although it was cold and stormy outside, he cleaned his house and put on a pot of cabbage soup and had a loaf of bread ready to feed the Master.

Hour after hour he watched out of the window for the first glimpse of him. He saw a peddler looking almost frozen and bent under the load of things he had to sell. So he opened his door, called him in, and gave him food.

The next person he saw was an old woman in rags. He fed her too and gave her his old coat. Still the Master had not come.

Then from his window he saw a child totter and fall in the snow. The poor man ran outside, picked up the child, and carried him into the house. He put him to bed and fed him the rest of the soup. When the child went to sleep, the poor man went back to the window.

"Ah," he said, "there is still time. The Master said he would come and I'm sure he will."

He sat down before his fire and fell asleep. Suddenly the room seemed to shine all around him. He saw that he and the child were not alone. There stood the Master, in his white robes, and he was smiling.

"Ah, Master," said the poor man, rubbing his eyes. "All day I have waited for you and you did not come."

The Master continued to smile. "Three times today have I visited your home. The poor peddler whom you rescued and fed — that was I. She to whom you gave your coat — that also was I. This little child whom you saved from death — that is I, for inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." The light faded, and the poor man sat up and rubbed his eyes. He was alone with the sleeping child, who was smiling in his sleep. But the poor man knew that the Master had come to his cabin that day.

Suddenly, through my remembering, I heard a pounding on our door. I sat up and Mother wakened. She jumped up, lighted the lamp, and put on her frilly kimono. I felt a thrill of excitement. Who was knocking? Perhaps the Master had come. I seized my kimono and followed Mother to the door just as she opened it a little crack, and then started to push it shut again.

But it was shoved open. I saw a big man with red whiskers, a black shirt, tight riding pants, and boots with spurs on them step into the room. His big, brown hands were on revolvers sticking out of the holsters at his hips, and the moon was shining in the door behind him. Mother let out a frightened cry and sat down quickly in a chair, holding

her kimono tight about her neck.

One look at him and I knew he wasn't the Master, not even in disguise.

"Who – who are you?" Mother said, trembly-like.

I didn't wait to hear his answer. He wasn't the Master, but with so many guns he must be a hunter after bears, even though all the animals we had ever seen were foxes, coyotes, and rabbits. I scrambled down the stairs, my curls flying, and ran toward him. I must have scared him as he swung around with both his revolvers pointed right at me.

"Did – did you get a b-bear?" I gasped, looking at the round holes in the revolvers.

"What bear, Curlylocks?" The man's voice was gruff.

"Like the one that tried to get Papa's other cow," I said, and ran to the window to peer out to see if our cows were all right. All I saw was a saddle horse with its reins down over its head. I turned back to the man. "Please don't let a bear get our cows," I said.

The man just stared at Mother and me. He didn't even put his revolvers back in his belt. "Are you two alone?" he asked.

I hastened to answer. "My brothers and sisters are asleep and Papa is away preaching to his flock."

"Preaching to his flock!" The big man put his revolvers back, then laughed. "He might just as well go looking for bears," he said.

"Someday he'll do that too," I said proudly, pointing at the rifle above the door. "He's got a brand-new gun."

Then the man did a funny thing. He snatched the rifle down, flipped out the shells, and stuck them in his pocket. "I'll take care of these," he said, looking at Mother, who was standing now, trying to object. Just then our milch cow bellowed. Bess, we called her, after the cow Father had shot by mistake, thinking she was a bear.

"Bess is all right," I cried.

"Sure Bess is all right," said the stranger, "and I'd thank you for a drink of her milk."

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

"We haven't any," I said. "Papa didn't get home to milk her."

He scowled at Mother. "Can't you even milk a cow?" he asked. Mother shook her head.

"Can you milk?" I asked hopefully.

Again the man laughed. "It's been a mighty long time since I've been a milk hand, Curlylocks," he said, "but get me a pail, and I'll try, but I'll be mighty hungry when I'm finished."

"We haven't any cabbage soup," I said, "but we have meat."

The man took the pail and looked at Mother, who I thought looked like a little girl with her dark hair in pigtails. "What's a lady like you doing on a homestead?" he said gruffly.

"Growing roots," I said, as he went out the door.

I saw the lamplight make rainbows of Mother's lashes and I knew she was blinking back scared tears. So I talked on and on, and as she put the kettle on to boil, I set the table. The tea was made, the bread and cold meat on the table, when the man came back with the pail full of milk.

"Where'd you come from?" I asked, as he sat down at the table.

"In this country we don't ask questions, Curlylocks," he said, taking a big bite of Mother's bread, and gulping down some tea.

"Papa says we learn things by asking questions," I replied.

"Not from me, you won't," he said, reaching for the pie plate, and taking two pieces.

"Why?" I asked, and Mother hushed me up.

"Now I must be on my way," said the big man, and walked across the floor, his spurs clinking. At the door he turned back, took the rifle bullets out of his pocket, and threw them on the table. "Thanks for the vittles, Ma'am," he said, and opened the door.

"Thanks for milking Bess," I called after him, but I guess he didn't hear as he didn't say I was welcome. The next

thing we heard was the pounding of his horse's hoofs.

Mother locked the door. Then she climbed up on a chair and took down the rifle and carried it upstairs. I didn't see why as she couldn't shoot, and she had left the bullets on the table.

I didn't see why she cried when she told Father about it, either, and why he had to kiss her several times. I never saw the man again except a picture in a paper that looked like him. The paper said he was a horse thief, and the police wanted him before he escaped to Canada.

But that night I heard Mother telling Father that she just couldn't go on living on a homestead. "We'll live in a town as soon as I've proved up the homestead," Father promised.

"We'll all be killed before then," said Mother.

Father grunted, and I heard the bedsprings squeak as he turned his back on Mother. She stopped crying and I looked at the moonbeams in the window, and imagined that I was walking up them until I could see the man in the moon. Then I fell asleep.

❖

We never knew when someone was coming to get married. It got so that every time Florence saw a man and a woman coming in our gate in a buggy she would run upstairs to get Father's wedding certificates.

Sometimes the bride and groom's parents came with them; sometimes they came alone; after one wedding the bride's father rode up with a gun and threatened to shoot Father for marrying his daughter to a no-account town fellow.

Father got cross and said they were old enough to know their own minds and they had a marriage license. Mother told the father that all parents felt that no man was good enough for their daughters, and someday she would likely feel the same as he did. That seemed to make him feel better and he put down his gun and Mother made him some tea and served him some of the cake she had given to the bride and groom.

"Don't be cross with them," Mother said, when he got up

to go. "Just remember that you have a son now as well as a daughter."

"Wal, I reckon if he treats her good, I'll not quarrel with him," said the father.

One night after we had gone to bed — except Mother, who was setting bread — John Brown and Miss Singleton came to get married. Mother came upstairs to waken Father.

"George David," she said, shaking him by the shoulder. "Mr. Brown and Miss Singleton are here to get married."

"What!" said Father, sitting up; "that pair?"

"Yes," whispered Mother.

Father rubbed his eyes. "Since they've waited so long, why can't they wait until morning?" He lay down again.

"Get up, George David," Mother insisted, "and get dressed."

She went downstairs; and Florence and I got out of bed and pulled on our kimonos. We went and sat on the stairs, as we never missed a wedding if we could help it.

Mr. Brown was telling Mother that he'd been late getting back from town with the marriage license because one of his horses had lost a shoe. Then he went to the parlor end of downstairs, and Miss Singleton stayed in the kitchen part, which was shut off by a curtain. To our surprise, she took off her dull brown dress and pulled a rustling white dress over her head and Mother did up the buttons.

"I'm glad I haven't got too fat for it," she said, with a funny little laugh, and it made me wonder if it had been true that she had been left at the church steps. Just when I was going to whisper this to Florence, Father came downstairs, all dressed and carrying his book and the wedding certificates.

Mother was still helping Miss Singleton to fix her hair so we went with Father to the parlor side, and sat together in the big rocking chair. When Miss Singleton came in, we saw Mr. Brown's face crinkle into smiles. And no wonder! She looked like the picture of herself when she was a little girl,

her hair loose and curly about her face. Mr. Brown took her hand in his, and they stood together. Mother played a bit of the wedding march, then Father began the "*Dearly Beloved. . . .*"

When Father finished the service, Mr. Brown kissed Miss Singleton, and then they were man and wife.

Then Mother kissed the bride, giving her best wishes, and shook hands with the groom and congratulated him. Never was I able to figure out why the groom was the only one to be congratulated. Then I waited for Father to kiss the bride, but he didn't — not like the last time when the bride was young and pretty. He just shook hands, and then picked up the wedding certificates.

Florence and I knew the certificates all by heart. Some were covered with roses; some had hands floating in the air above a bed of flowers; some had doves of peace; but best of all were the blue-backed ovals for the pictures of the bride and groom. And now Miss Singleton had chosen. I let a sigh escape me. She had chosen the best one.

Mother made tea, and then the bride changed back into her brown dress. When she left, her certificate, which changed her name to Mrs. Brown, was clasped tightly in her hand.

"I hope they put the picture of the little girl in one of the ovals," I said.

Mother and Father laughed, but I guess I was too sleepy to see why; besides, I was wondering how soon they would have a baby, for after all we knew that when one was married one had babies.

9

IN SEPTEMBER of the first year on the farm we children started to a country school. Florence was ten; we twins, going on eight; John, six. It was a half-mile walk from home, and all the grades were in one room, all the seats facing the blackboard, above which was the American flag. We were the only little ones wearing shoes and we begged Mother to let us go barefooted.

"You've gone barefooted most of the summer," she said, "and you must wear your shoes to school."

We did for a few days; then, under pressure of the other children's scorn, we started taking them off halfway to school and hiding them under a culvert through which a small stream ran. After school we would wash our feet and put our shoes back on again. But Mother caught on, and once again we had to wear shoes.

Besides exercising our brains with knowledge, we played games at school: baseball in the summer and "fox and geese" in the winter. There was another game we learned — "stick in the mud." A hole of about four inches wide and three deep was dug in the ground, and a round stick about six inches long was placed across it. Using another stick, like a broom handle, we tried first to lift up the small stick, at the

same time sending it flying as far away from the hole as possible. The distance was measured and scored up. The next step in the game was to put the small stick with its end resting on the bottom of the hole, its top coming over the edge. Then, using our pole, we whacked the end of the small stick, making it fly into the air, then we struck it, the object this time being to see how far we could bat it away, and so increase our score.

We played horseshoes at home and at school too. At home Father played with us, even to making up a baseball team with the help of the Litka children. Because of his artificial leg, one of us was always chosen to do Father's running. He could bat the ball so far that even I, who was never a good runner, could make a home run for him.

At school our first teacher, Miss Hines, did her own running. But the main thing I remember about her is that she made peanut butter, and once I spent the night with her and helped shell the nuts and put them through a meat grinder. The next day we had peanut butter sandwiches at school.

I remember also that Mackay and I almost got lost when we went to meet her to bring her to our Halloween party — one of our special days, as we called them.

We had as many special days as there were colors in the rainbow, and somehow we seemed to associate them with rainbows. There was Christmas, and Easter, and in between there was not only Bobby Burns, Saint Valentine, and Saint Patrick but, now that we were Yankees, there was Lincoln, celebrated not only for his industry in learning but for his giving freedom to the slaves; there was Washington's birthday, and he became the hero of truth for admitting that he cut down a cherry tree.

Our Easters on the farm became special-special. For nights before, though we children were not aware of it then, Mother stayed up late painting Easter eggs. At dawn on Easter Sunday she got up and hid them among the small bushes near

the house, in the woodpile and haystack, and in nooks and corners about the house and barn. As soon as we were dressed, we took baskets and boxes and started to look for bunny eggs, as we called the Easter ones.

The air rang with squeals and laughter as we found eggs of every hue; eggs with our names on them; eggs with funny faces; and eggs like rainbows.

"Wish the hens would lay pretty eggs too," said Innis, strutting about, his chubby face rosy and his fair curls catching the sunlight, making him look like a baby angel.

We agreed with him, and finally, the last egg found, we trooped into the house. Then came the egg-eating contest, as on Easter Sunday we could eat even more than we wanted. I'm doubtful about ever winning.

After Easter there was May Day. In town we had made paper baskets at school, filled them with candy at home, and taken them to our friends' doorsteps, knocked, and run, peeking around corners to see their surprise when they found a May gift. Then we would race home to see if we had received any May baskets. We had a May Pole dance too. But on the farm we wove paper baskets and Mother filled them with candy for the Sunday school children. We even joined in celebrating the Declaration of American Independence on July the Fourth.

In the fall, our special days included Thanksgiving and Halloween. The American Thanksgiving honored the Pilgrims of the *Mayflower,* who sought a new land in America where they could worship God as they wished. I remember a hoity-toity woman boasting about her ancestors coming out in the *Mayflower.* Mother couldn't resist telling about her grandmother being presented to Queen Victoria, and her great-grandmother sailing the Pacific with her captain husband. That night Father teased her about it.

"Your mother can trace her ancestors back to the Angel Gabriel," he said, chuckling.

Mother blushed and retorted, "Your father can trace his

ancestors back to Old Nick." She turned to go away but had to pass Father's chair, and he caught her and pulled her down on his knee. "Now, Molly," he said, "you know it doesn't matter who our ancestors were. It's what we are ourselves."

Of course that thought ended up in a sermon in which it seemed that we should take neither credit nor blame for our ancestors. All we could do was to make our own life, and if someday we were good ancestors for someone else, all the better.

But to return to our special days. Halloween was always thrilling. At school we cut out black cats and witches riding broomsticks. We'd made Halloween lanterns, and at home we made faces on pumpkins, hollowed them out, and put a candle inside. We'd played ghosts with pillowcases and sheets, and Mother had promised us a real party and invited all the children who could come, and our teacher, Miss Hines.

Mackay and I decided to go to meet her, and hand in hand, under a sky lighted with stars and an orange moon, we set out. We missed her and almost got lost ourselves, then we located our draw and followed it to our pond and up to our corn patch, where the pumpkins shone in the moonlight.

Suddenly we saw a sight that made us cling to each other trembling with fear. Coming toward us with waving arms was a real ghost, as big as a giant. He blocked the way to the house, and our hair fairly stood on end. We tried to speak, but words wouldn't come. Then the ghost spoke and we recognized Father's voice. It melted our fear like magic and we ran around him in circles, eluding his outstretched arms. Then from the house came other ghosts and witches, chasing each other, tumbling over pumpkins, and tripping over vines, as they ran through the rustling cornstalks.

Finally they returned to the house for games. There was a cornhusking race; a popcorn-shelling contest; and later we ate popcorn taffy balls that Mother had made during the day.

We ducked for apples, bumped heads as we tried to get bites out of apples hanging from strings.

Mother brought in the tins of taffy she had cooling, and we each took a piece and pulled, folded, pulled, and twisted the brown candy until it turned the color of Florence's hair, and was ready for Mother to cut into pieces of candy with her scissors.

While it hardened we had a mock wedding. Hermione, the biggest girl, dressed in Father's trousers, stiff hat, and preaching coat, to be the groom. Miss Hines put on Mother's white dress, and had a lacy curtain for a veil. Father, of course was the minister, and Mother played the wedding march.

It was just like a real wedding, even to a ring, and the groom kissed the bride, and so did everyone else, including Father. When it was all over, John went up to Miss Hines and handed her Anne's baby doll.

"Now you can have a baby," he said, and insisted that she carry it around with her.

Never had we had such a Halloween, we thought, as we ate lunch, then said good-by to our company. And so sure were we that Hermione and Miss Hines were married that for weeks we younger ones thought that they would have a real baby.

How Mr. and Mrs. Minister ever found the time or had the energy to make those special days, which we looked forward to with joyful anticipation, and backward at with a glow of happiness, I still do not know. But they did think they were as important as food.

One time a deacon in one of Father's churches, whom we children called Sour Face because his face was always screwed up as if he'd just eaten a sour pickle, took it upon himself to criticize Father for encouraging these special days by preaching special sermons for them.

"We do not live by bread alone, Sir," said Father smiling. "And while we observe these days, we need not lose sight of their religious origin."

Sour Face scowled. "It's a sin to spend money on such nonsense," he grumbled.

"We do not grumble at paying for our daily bread to keep our bodies alive, do we?" asked Father.

"That's different," retorted Sour Face.

"I can't agree with you, Sir," said Father. "Why shouldn't we pay for our spiritual food, which is even more necessary to our happiness than bread?"

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

10

I DON'T REMEMBER how it came about that Father figured he had put in enough time on the farm to prove it. Perhaps it was Mother who convinced him that leaving a hired man to do the harvesting would count. But, after all, ministers are bad businessmen as a rule. Anyway, when school started in September, we had moved a hundred and sixty miles to a church in Bowman, North Dakota.

I remember Bowman as the razorstrop period of our life. It came into play oftener there than all the rest of our life put together. It seemed that no matter what we did we got into trouble. Perhaps it was because we had been running wild for almost two years on the farm. At Bowman we had a small yard and a nice manse, but once again we were the minister's kids in earnest.

Once again we had to meet the challenge of the other children and show them that being the minister's kids need not put us on pedestals of goodness. Once again we had to show them that we could do the forbidden as well as they could, even better.

Father was a minister again in earnest too. For seven days of the week he was at the beck and call of his flock. Their burdens were pushed onto his broad shoulders. He had to

find words of comfort even for those he must have felt were to blame for their own grief or trouble. He had to fight their battles against sin and poverty as well as his own.

He couldn't escape to a cornfield, a garden, or even to turning the sod to find peace and strength to work out his problems and his sermons. He couldn't find comfort in watching things grow or renewed spiritual strength in the sweat of the brow in stooking grain or shocking corn, or filling the cellar with the products of his garden. He couldn't stand alone in a meadow and take big, long breaths of the air that stirred at his feet or brushed his cheeks like a kiss. His unhappiness and worry showed in many ways, but to us the most disturbing was his impatience with our mistakes in growing up, his lack of time to explain things to us, his resort to the razorstrop to direct us in the path of goodness.

We weren't old enough to understand that life looks different when one is unhappy. Little things, even naughty children, could amuse when one was at peace with one's self. Unhappiness brought irritation, and often our actions in learning to live would be the last straw to try Father's patience. Needless to say, we often wondered why we were punished for things we'd done in safety before.

Now it was Mother who sang even as she scrubbed the manse from cellar to attic. She sang hymns, Negro spirituals, "Red Wing," and even "Little Brown Jug." Now when it rained Father didn't sing "Showers of Blessing." He just went into the study, shut the door, and worked on the Greek Gospels or wrote sermons, which somehow seemed harder to understand than the ones he had made on the farm. In spite of this he too managed to get caught doing something he preached against.

He had said that buying lottery tickets was a sin because it was gambling. But one day when I was at the grocery store with him a pretty girl asked him to buy a ticket on a chest of silver.

"No, thank you," said Father, but she kept on coaxing,

standing real close to him. He kept backing up until the counter stopped him, and by this time she had her hand on his arm.

"This is the last ticket," she said, "and I'm sure it is a lucky one."

It was Father's last stand too. He gave in and bought the ticket. He stuck it in his vest pocket and on the way home he said, "We won't tell Mother about this ticket, Brownie."

"We've a secret then," I said.

Father's lips tilted. "That's right. Just a secret between you and me."

I felt real proud over that and never even told my twin. But Father got caught anyway. A couple of weeks later a parcel, addressed to Father, was delivered at our door. It was the chest of silver, ornately designed with the grapevine and fruit. Father had to do some explaining, but the pretty silver helped to quieten the troubled waters.

The boys missed the farm most, even though Father had brought a team of horses and two cows with him to Bowman. Every morning before school the boys took the cows to the edge of the town to pasture them, returning for them in the evening. Walking one way, they decided, was enough, so they took turns riding the cows home. They rode down the main street like cowboys, until the threat of the razorstrop changed their route.

Eventually they decided that riding the cow's back was tame, so they started sliding down their necks to sit between the horns. The cows resented this familiarity, John's mount in particular. She tossed her head and John flew off, head over heels, and arrived home with a badly scratched face. This time the razorstrop went into action, and there were no more cow riders in our family.

Innis, being the youngest boy, was often the odd one when Mackay and John played games. Sometimes he would cry, and sometimes he'd get attention some other way. One day he stood on a stone in our yard preaching. He waved his

arms like Father did when he wanted to stress a point. Innis' sermons were usually a jumble of words, bits of recitations, or Bible stories. His audience were not only children, but passing adults. One day the fat druggist paused to listen.

"Why don't you preach on Sunday for your papa, Innis?" the druggist asked. "You're a good preacher."

Innis stuck out his lower lip, looked up at the fat man, and scowled. "I know I'm a good preacher," he said, "but I pray like hell."

The druggist, laughing crazy-like we thought, went to tell Father. We were afraid Innis would be in for a razorstrop session, but Father didn't mention it. After supper he took Innis to the study and taught him a new prayer.

Then I guess he decided it was time for us all to take part in public prayers. So each morning, now that we again had time for morning prayers, we took turns praying aloud. This led to an incident that I never forgot. Violet, a school friend, was staying all night with us. At her home they played with the devil's cards – the ones that had pictures of kings, queens, jacks, spades, hearts, diamonds, and clubs on them. When one of the players did not want to tell what he had in his hand, he said, "Pass."

At our prayers the morning she was there, she knelt beside me. When I'd taken my turn, Father said, "You're next, Violet." I heard Violet gasp, then she blurted, "Pass!" I peeked through my fingers and saw Mother's shoulders shaking and Father's lips quivering. He tightened them, then called on Innis, who said his new prayer.

Innis also used it the next time he preached from his stone pulpit. Then seeing Florence, who was standing with her back turned, he made a flying leap at her. She fell backward and cut her hand. This time Innis got the razorstrop – not because he jumped on Florence, but because he lied about it.

Our stilts got us into trouble too. Stilt walking became popular while we were on the farm and the boys made their own. Mackay's got taller and taller until he had to climb the

sloping roof of the shed to get on them. Then he would walk about the yard shouting, "Here comes the giant," and we'd scatter to get out of his path as if he were a real giant.

We girls practiced on stilts too, but were satisfied with staying in comfortable falling distance from the ground. But in Bowman, Mackay made the tallest stilts yet, his feet being six feet from the ground. He had all the boys in town trying to match him, and that was how he came to grief. He stepped into a hole and went headlong, this time breaking his other arm. Father cut his stilts up for firewood.

It seemed that no matter what we did we somehow managed to get into trouble. One day when we were sent outside so that Father could study his sermon, it started to sprinkle. We climbed to the loft of an unused barn in the lot behind ours. It was full of furniture belonging to the owner, who had rented her house to another couple.

We climbed over boxes and used the sideboard for a ship to sail to wicked Africa as missionaries. We climbed up on the rafters, pretending we were angels; then, tiring of that, we explored the dresser drawers for hidden treasures. We unearthed dishes and pictures, and had a church auction sale. In the midst of our fun the new tenants appeared, and Father's razorstrop had a good workout that night.

Even when we tried to be good, we got into trouble. One day I had a fight with Jimmy Scott. He was freckle-faced, fat, and about my age, and lived down the street. He was teasing me, pulling my curls, and I turned and ran at him, bunting him in the stomach with my head. It knocked the air out of him and he went home bawling. His mother came and tattled to mine. She insisted that I started the fight. I denied it. Jimmy said I did too, and Mother, perhaps because she wasn't feeling well with a new baby on the way, decided that I was fibbing. I wasn't that time. But Mother said if I persisted in denying that I was wrong I'd get spanked anyway. I was stuck. If I told the truth, she wouldn't believe me. If I told a lie and said I started the fight, I'd still get

spanked. I tried figuring that one out and came to the conclusion that I'd stick to the truth as God could hear me. So I got the spanking, and even as I smarted from it, I vowed I'd get even with Jimmy.

My opportunity came a few days later when Jimmy found me alone in our yard. "Let's play in the barn loft," I said.

"Suits me," agreed Jimmy.

We climbed the load of hay that Father hadn't pitched to the loft yet, then went up the wall ladder. For a while we walked the rafters, tumbling off into the hay. Then I got an idea.

"You heard Papa preach about Peter walking on the water?" I asked.

Jimmy nodded.

"Do you believe it?" I asked.

"Sure, it's in the Bible."

"Well, if you believed it you could walk right out into the sky without falling – if you really believe it," I said, pointing at the loft door, and hurried on as Jimmy looked dubious. "All you have to say is: 'I have faith. I can walk in the air without falling.' It's simple. Let's do it."

"Who'll go first?" asked Jimmy, holding back.

I might have known that he'd need more convincing. Now we would have to draw straws and Jimmy never played fair at that. Still, I knew a trick too. So I picked up some hay. "All right, we'll draw for it," I said, then turned my back to fix the lengths so that Jimmy couldn't guess which was the longer.

"There," I said, turning around.

Jimmy examined my hand. He saw that both ends beneath my fist were the same, and one at the top was longer.

"Short or long, go first?" he asked.

"Long," I said, trying not to laugh.

Jimmy pulled the short one at the top. "You go first," he said, even before I opened my fist.

"No, I don't." I showed Jimmy that he had really chosen

the long one because I'd just stuck in another piece that stuck out at the bottom to make it so he couldn't cheat.

"Go on," I said, "unless you're a scaredy cat."

Jimmy screwed up his face until it looked like one big freckle, then he ran toward the door whispering: "I know I can. I know I can." Then he gave a terrific leap and disappeared. The next instant I heard a scream. But I still think if he'd had more faith and just kept on walking, he would have been all right, because the load of hay was just below. But his jump took him too far and he landed on the outer edge and fell to the ground. I jumped down on the hay and slid down beside him.

"My arm, my arm," he screamed.

Mother and Father came out of the manse, and I was sent for Jimmy's mother. I didn't want to go. Mrs. Scott was a spider of a woman with a round, pasty-white face and bulging black eyes. From her cushionlike body her arms and legs protruded, surprisingly spindly. Her feet were small, and when she walked along the street her heels clicked like the hammering of a woodpecker.

"I always say what I think," she had told Mother, her words sputtering drops of water on a greased griddle, "and I told Mrs. Jones, in a nice way of course, that her son Lawrence might as well quit school since he didn't have the brains for learning." Then she proudly related other times when she had told people what she thought. "Yes, I told Miss Lane that she should give up the thought of getting married because no man wants to be burdened with a crippled wife."

When Mother told Father about her, he frowned. "There's nothing wrong with Lawrence's brains," he said. "He's a dreamer and someday he'll likely be famous." He was more worried over little Miss Lane, who had taken to her bed. "You'd better go and see her Molly. Tell her about some invalid wives whom men have loved – Elizabeth Browning, for instance, and the girl back home who had infantile

paralysis, yet married and had two children."

Mother went to see Miss Lane several times, and soon she was out of bed and had got a job in the telephone office. Mother went to see her there too, and one day she came home looking very happy.

"What's the joke?" asked Father.

"I've just seen Miss Lane. The bank teller was there, but he left before I did."

"Yes?" Father raised his brows.

"He's in love with her. He heard her voice on the phone and fell in love with it. So he went to see her. Now he drops in every day. You'd hardly know Miss Lane now. She's like — like —" she looked at the padded cozy over our teapot, "she's like a silver teapot released from a dull cozy that has kept it warm until the right time." Now she smiled. "The poor darling hugged me and told me that he was the first man who made her feel she was like other women."

"Good," said Father and, passing Mother, leaned down and kissed her cheek. "Now if our dear, tactless friend will mind her own business, the romance is safe."

I knew he meant Mrs. Scott. "What's 'tactless' mean?" I asked, as I was always interested in new words, though Father always said I used them in the wrong place.

He tweaked my curls. "Tact," he said, "is doing good in the best way. And tactless, or not having tact, is doing something in the worst way."

"A sermon on tactlessness might be using tact about now," said Mother, her eyes laughing.

Father ran his fingers through his hair. "That's an idea," he said, but he didn't preach the sermon — not until after Jimmy broke his arm.

When I got to Mrs. Scott's house, I just told her Jimmy had hurt his arm, then I turned and ran home and she followed me. Father had carried Jimmy inside and put him on our couch and Mother had phoned the doctor.

When Jimmy saw his mother, he began to howl and told

her that I had pushed him out of the loft. It took Father some time to get the truth, and when he did, Mrs. Scott looked as if she'd howl like Jimmy. She shook her finger at me.

"You're a bad little girl," she said.

"I'm not," I said. "I'm one of God's children."

"God's children!" She gave a loud snort. "Satan's imps, you mean." Then she turned on Father, still looking cross. "Why," she demanded, "is it that the minister's kids are always such little demons?"

Father's face got red; then he sort of grinned and ran his fingers through his hair. "I don't know," he drawled, "unless it's because they have no one else to play with except the children of the congregation."

"Well, I never—" sputtered Mrs. Scott, and only the arrival of the doctor stopped her. Jimmy's arm was broken, so I guess I got even, and to my surprise escaped the razor-strop. I guess Father was still cross at Mrs. Scott for calling his children Satan's imps.

Getting even with Jimmy didn't turn out quite as I expected, though. All the kids went to see him, taking him gifts, and before I knew it he had turned into a hero. He claimed he had jumped first to keep me from getting hurt. Imagine that, after all the trouble I had with fixing the straws!

Father did give a sermon on tact, and though he didn't say so I knew he was thinking of Mrs. Scott. There was a lot in the sermon that I didn't understand such as "tact" having the Latin word *tango* as a parent, which meant to touch, as with delicate fingers upon some musical instrument.

"The man or woman who always speaks his or her mind is often tactless," said Father, "for there are times when speaking your mind will do nothing but mischief and bring grief to others. It would be better if kindness controlled our tongues and kept us from causing sorrow."

Then he told the story of a minister who was preaching his farewell sermon. As he sat down, one of the brethren got

up to pray: "Lord, may we hear our minister's last sermon with grateful hearts. And, Lord, may he preach the truth in his new church, as he has never spoken it here."

The story brought a titter, and Father added, "That, my friends, was hardly using tact." Later in the sermon he told another story about an Ontario minister who was sitting with a patient who was going to have a serious operation. While the doctor was getting the instruments ready, the minister opened his Bible to read to the worried man. Kindly, well-meaning, but lacking in tact, he read from Job: "My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart. . . . If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. And where is now my hope? . . ." A groan interrupted the minister's reading, and he looked up to see that the frightened patient had fainted, because of his tactless selection from the Bible.

As Father went on preaching, it seemed that even Jesus used tact, speaking in parable, not with a bludgeon of harsh words. So we, who were followers of Jesus, would do well to copy him in our speech as well as in our deeds.

He finished his sermon by advising his flock to guard their tongues. "Do not let your tongue be a mischief maker. Do not boast or be proud of saying, 'There, I got that off my chest.' Kind, gentle words are quite as easy to say as harsh, bitter ones."

Then I was sure he meant Mrs. Scott, and I peeked around Mackay and looked across the aisle at her. Jimmy was beside her and made a face at me, so I stuck my tongue out at him.

In spite of Mrs. Scott's cross words, we still managed to get into trouble, even little Anne. She was always running away. Father fixed up a line to tie her to the clothesline, but no matter how he tied her, she managed to get loose and follow us to school or just go exploring.

"Anne's gone; run and find her," was the greeting Mother

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

would give us when we got home.

We would divide up, each taking a different direction, and eventually we would find her in someone's house or at the store eating candy.

In the same store we would bring our pennies to buy a penny of this, that, and those — all for one penny. The candy I remember best was the corn candy — orange and yellow in the shape of a kernel of corn. Another favorite was licorice, and we'd come home with black rings around our mouths.

Another day my three brothers all got the strap. The Bowman church was a big, square building with a windowed basement where we held our Sunday school. One Saturday it was the scene of a most peculiar contest that I was watching when Mr. Sour Face Deacon caught me.

I was peeking through the window and saw my three brothers standing side by side on one of the tables. They were so busily occupied that they did not see me. The expressions on their faces were typical. Mackay's was all concentration, his body tense with the effort to win the contest. John's face showed indifference as if, "Oh, what's the use," and he was making a halfhearted effort. Innis, his round cheeks flushed, his fair curls standing on end, was giving Mackay more competition. And what were they doing? From their exalted position they might have been competing as artist's models for the child fountain that I saw years later below the Sacré Coeur Basilica in Paris.

I heard a noise behind me and looked up to see Mr. Sour Face, and he looked as if he'd swallowed a pickle whole when he peeked through the window. After one glance he took me by the arm, and I kicked out at the window to warn the boys, before he marched me into the manse to see Father.

His voice was trembling when he related what he'd seen. "It's a sacrilege, Sir — that's what it is. Your sons have no right to play there. Why isn't the door locked?"

It was, but I knew they had gone in through the coal trap door at the back. "Mackay was winning," I piped up

proudly, and Father quickly covered his mouth with his hand, but not before I saw him biting his lip to keep from laughing.

"I'll attend to them at once, Sir," Father said, starting for the door.

Needless to say, with my warning kick against the window, the boys were gone, though not the clues they had left behind them. And that night the razorstrop came into play.

We finally plotted against that strop, and John came up with the idea of dropping it down the toilet hole, "where the stinking thing belongs," he said.

Mother saw them out of the window as they slipped into the toilet with the strop. When they came out without it, she became suspicious and questioned them. "You'll have to get it out and wash it," she said.

It took the rake and the hoe and the efforts of the three boys to rescue the strop before Father got home. Mother didn't tattle so they escaped punishment with it.

Before the year was over, we were all heartily tired of the razorstrop and greeted with cheers the news that we had to return to the farm for another six months, or lose it. When it came to packing, Innis said, "We won't need to pack the razorstrop, Mamma."

Mother laughed, though she wasn't happy, as we were, at the idea of returning to the farm. "Papa will still need it to sharpen his razor," she said.

Satisfied that it would be needed only for what it was invented for, we allowed it to be packed.

11

BEFORE WE LEFT Bowman we became acquainted with mission barrels and tramps. There were all sorts of tramps. Tall, short, fat, thin, fair, dark, neatly dressed, in rags, grumbling, or happy-go-lucky tramps came to our back door.

"I do believe that everyone in town sends them here," said Mother, who was nervous with them. Unless Father was home, she would make them wait on the back steps until she prepared food.

There was one tramp whom I remember in particular. He was a big man with a red face, fox-colored hair and whiskers, and twinkling blue eyes. He talked with a booming voice. We children were entertaining him on the back steps as he ate his beef sandwiches when Father came home and joined us.

The tramp thanked Father for the food, then lighted his pipe and told us a story about another tramp who came to a house and asked for some water so that he could make soup with the stone he carried with him.

"What?" said the lady. "Stone soup with just water?"

"Well," replied the tramp, "it would improve it to add a bit of onion."

"What," said the woman, returning with an onion, "stone soup with water and onion?"

"Well, it does improve with a bit of potato," said the tramp.

"What," said the woman, getting a potato, "stone soup with water, onion, and potato?"

"Well, it could be improved with a bit of carrot, Ma'am," replied the tramp.

"What," said the woman, getting the carrot, "stone soup with water, onion, potato, and carrot?"

"Well, it might improve it with a bit of leftover meat," replied the tramp.

"What," said the woman, returning with the leftover meat, "stone soup with water, onion, potato, carrot, and leftover meat?"

"Yes, Ma'am," said the tramp, taking out the stone and proceeding to eat the now stoneless soup.

Father retold this story so many times that I never forgot it. And, needless to say, that tramp went away with some never-to-be-returned silver jingling in his pocket, and quite rightly so as everyone knows that a good story deserves a piece of silver.

❖

With the mission barrels and boxes we, not the tramps, were on the receiving end, and even we children soon learned the differences between barrels and boxes — after the first one.

Mother had received a letter from a Mrs. Hart in Oberlin, Ohio, saying, "The chairman of our barrel committee has been so enthusiastic in preparing these two barrels, and hopes that Uncle Sam will hurry them along, for you may need some of the warm clothes."

By this time we knew who Uncle Sam was, an uncle to every American child, and it was November and we waited excitedly for the barrels. "Getting barrels and boxes of cloth-

ing is one way the church missions helps to pay Papa's salary," Mother had explained, and she too was excited, hoping for winter clothing not only for us but for other needy children.

The barrels arrived when Father was at the church attending a meeting. So we opened and unpacked them and soon our big kitchen looked like a secondhand store. Worn dresses, trousers, hobble skirts, and evening gowns; old shoes, gold slippers, broken umbrellas, queer hats, old sweaters, and moth-eaten muffs were strewn about.

Mother leaned against the cabinet, and there were tears on her lashes. "Trash!" she said. Just then Innis stuck his head around a barrel. He had put on a lady's hat with a damaged ostrich feather, and was teetering in a pair of high-heeled shoes.

"Look at Innis," Florence cried, and we saw him and started to laugh. "Let's all dress up," added Florence, "and surprise Papa when he comes home."

"Let's," said Mother, and her voice was choky-like.

So we dressed up in the mission barrel clothes. Mother took off her waist and put on a rose evening gown that had a very low neck, and a sort of bustle back. Mackay had the man's dress shirt and long pants, and looked like a penguin. John had the frock coat, and Innis another stiff hat and a man's dancing shoes. We girls had the muffs, feathered hats, and dresses that dragged on the floor, and high-heeled shoes. Baby Margaret sat in the rocking chair draped in a silk waist, and Mother lined the rest of us up, then sat down at the organ.

"As soon as we hear Papa coming we will all sing," she said.

Everyone wanted a different song, from "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "Old Black Joe," and "Yankee Doodle," to "Little Brown Jug." We finally agreed on "Little Brown Jug," and Mother was playing it when Florence, who had stationed herself at the window, called, "Here comes Papa and . . ."

The music drowned out the rest of her words and Mother led the singing, her back to the door, while we faced it. We were just repeating:

"'Ha! Ha! Ha! You and me,
"Little brown jug," don't I love thee! . . .'"

while Mother swayed to the music, when the front door opened and closed and Father appeared in the doorway. At his side was Mr. Sour Face and his pretty wife, who was the president of the Ladies' Aid. Father's face was red. Sour Face looked more puckery than ever, and Mrs. Sour Face's brown eyes opened so wide that her brows almost reached her hairline, but her mouth seemed to be deciding whether to laugh or shut tight. We kept on swaying and singing until Father spoke.

"Elsie!" He almost shouted, and his tone made Mother turn, a saucy look on her face.

Her saucy look changed to one of horror when she saw he had brought company home with him, and all the fun went out of her eyes.

"What is the meaning of this?" Father went on, crosser than he sounded even when he was preaching about the devil.

"The — the mission barrels came," said Mother, her lips trembling, "so we thought we'd dress up."

"So I see," Father said, and now he looked as if he might laugh; then he saw Mr. Sour Face. "Come into my study, Sir," he said, "until my wife makes us some tea." He included Mr. Sour Face's wife with a motion of his hand, but she smiled at him.

"I'll help prepare the tea," she said, and the men went to the study and shut the door. Then, to our surprise, she winked at Mother, took one more look at us, and shut the parlor door, and sat down on the sofa and started to laugh. She laughed so hard that tears rolled down her cheeks. Mother stared at her, as if she could cry; then she too looked

at us, and sat down on the sofa and laughed too, trying to smother it with her handkerchief.

"Do — do you mean that these masquerade costumes were really sent you to wear?" asked Sour Face's pretty wife.

"They were," said Mother, "and I've half a notion to go to church in them next Sunday."

Mrs. Sour Face went off into another peal of laughter. "Oh, dear, I wish you would," she said between giggles.

Mother sobered. "I wouldn't — not really," she said, and she looked at the door. "But I'd like to send a picture of us to the people who packed the barrels."

Then Mother pulled off her dress and told us to take off our "new" clothes and put them back in the barrels; then we could have a tea party in the kitchen while she served Father and her guests.

When the company went and Mother was wiping the teacups, she was cross at Father for speaking so crossly to us. "How could I help it?" he said, picking up the stiff hat from the top of the barrel and sticking it on the side of his head, then grinning at her. "I was afraid the deacon would think you were a wild bunch of heathens." Then he laughed. "You should have seen your face when you saw us in the doorway. It sure looked guilty, to say nothing about being as wantonly pretty as any Gibson girl."

Gibson girls were the pin-up girls of that period, but Mother flicked out at him with the tea towel. Father dodged, and his hat came down over one eye.

"Look at yourself," said Mother laughing. "You look like a rake."

Why she thought that, I couldn't figure out, because I didn't think he looked like our rake. Even though his hair was fair, he looked more like the picture of the matinee idol on the *East Lynne* billboards.

The next time we saw the barrel clothes they were used at a church concert, the same one where Florence won a prize for reciting "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight," which

was quite a feat for a twelve-year-old.

When the play started, I saw Mrs. Sour Face lean past her husband and wink at Mother, and then they both put their handkerchiefs up to their faces, bowed their heads, and their shoulders shook. I knew they were laughing, and now even Father was grinning.

With the barrel experience behind us, we weren't quite so elated to hear in March that a box was being packed to be sent to us. The letter announcing it, from New Haven, Connecticut, sounded more promising. "I am enclosing a list of things we always put in boxes," wrote Miss Skinner. "We always send a suit of new clothes to the minister and boys. Now if you would add to this list things you need, if it comes within our means we will be pleased to send them to you. Also do you prefer pajamas or nightshirts? . . . It is our earnest desire to help you in all ways that we can. With so many children, your life must be full of many interests."

She was right there. That same year another letter came from the barrel and box committee in New York. A Mrs. Ballard wrote to Mother: "We hope you will find the contents to your liking and recognize the loving friendliness that tried to select things carefully. In this letter you will find a money order for twenty-five dollars, as we always love to send a bit of money to our missionary's wife to do as she pleases with. Accept it with our love. Wishing you and Mr. Robinson much joy in your work, and feeling, in a way, that you are representing us there in doing work for our Master." Then in a postscript she added: "Some dress goods has also been sent to you. We thought it would make the girls some dresses. We shall be anxious to know if your suit fits, as well as Mr. Robinson's and the boys."

The money was a lovely surprise for Mother as the only money she had for her own was the wedding fees, which were only what the grooms felt like paying. The list included spreads, blankets, sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths and

napkins, towels, aprons, handkerchiefs, underwear, hose, shoes, hat, soap, stationery, toothbrushes, toys, books, etc.

When the boxes arrived, it was like half a dozen Christmases rolled into one. I still have one of the tablecloths that Mother gave me when I was married, but then we children almost went crazy with rapture over the books, toys, and dolls. There were two big dolls, with jointed arms, wrists, knees, and ankles. They were dressed in beautiful handmade clothes, even little coats and straw hats. I called mine Bluebell, and Florence called hers Gail. There was a black-haired one we called Juanita, and at least three more. There were mechanical toys, and the books included: *Black Beauty; Beautiful Joe;* the Elsie Dinsmore series; the Horatio Alger books; *Oliver Twist;* Kingsley's *Water Babies; Little Women* and *Little Men; Daddy Longlegs;* and Helen Keller's story. We put them on the shelf beside Father's Greek Bible and his books of poems, and a little book of essays called *The Pleasures of Life.*

There wasn't an old thing in either of those boxes, and Mother's blue suit fitted her to perfection. The dresses for Florence and me were blue and red serge, and they also fitted, as did the boys' suits, for Mother had sent all our measurements in answer to Miss Skinner's and Mrs. Ballard's letters.

" Mamma would let you kiss the lady for this box," I said to Father, as I hugged Bluebell.

" She sure would," said Father, and winked at Mother and her face got pink; then he turned back to reading the paper that told about war between England and Germany.

Before we left Bowman we had a new baby, which didn't surprise us, as every place we went we seemed to get one more. While he was being born, we were outside playing and Mackay and John were walking on new stilts and wouldn't let Innis have a turn. He cried, and he was the first one in the house after the baby was born.

When Mother found out why he was crying, she said:

" Never mind, Innis. You can be the first one to hold the new baby."

Innis' tears dried quickly, and he sat on a chair beside Mother's bed and the nurse handed him the baby. For days, no matter what the older boys did, he gloated over this experience.

But it was Florence and I who named the new baby. We picked on the names of two boys we liked; our beaux, as our Uncle Tommy used to call the boys we liked. I had my first beau when I was past five, and Florence was almost seven. Florence's beau was Phillip, the thin son of her fat schoolteacher. My beau was George, the son of Uncle Tommy's minister. He was eight. We had picked flowers together in the woods and played games on the streets. But one day Phillip and George came to our house when Mother was away. We girls were thrilled and rose to the occasion. We each took a room and entertained them as we'd seen a young woman who was staying with Mother entertain her beau. We had observed her through the stovepipe hole that opened into the parlor.

I showed my beau the family album and fed him on cookies. But suddenly our tête-à-tête came to an end. The boys saw Mother returning, and, to our surprise, took to their heels. We didn't see why, but evidently they had been chased away before by mothers who wanted to choose their daughters' beaux. My respect for the superior sex suffered a jolt from which it never quite recovered.

In Bowman there was a boy named Harold whom I liked, while Florence knew a boy named Dahl whom she liked. So when it came to naming our new baby, I wanted to call him Harold, and she wanted to call him Dahl. Mother compromised and gave him both names, Harold Dahl. When he was three weeks old in July, we left Bowman to return to the farm.

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

12

OUR RETURN to the farm was by caravan. Father bought a wagon with a hayrack. Over this he put canvas and loaded it with our belongings, setting up a bed for Mother and the new baby to rest on as we traveled. We took our cows back too, and the buggy, as well as a saddle pony. The boys and Father took turns riding horseback and driving the buggy and wagon. We camped at the side of the road like gypsies, cooking our meals over campfires, and curling up in the hayrack to sleep.

We children loved it, and rejoiced as each mile of the hundred and sixty brought us closer to the farm. Mother wasn't any happier this time than she had been on leaving Lead City.

"There'll be nothing but grief come of this," she said.

"Now, Molly," said Father, "there'll be no serpent in our Garden of Eden. You wouldn't have me lose the farm for the sake of a few more months on it, would you?"

"Of course not," said Mother, and fussed over the water she was heating to give baby Harold his bath in the dishpan.

It was the same dishpan she used a couple of months later when Harold had convulsions. He held his breath until he went blue in the face; his eyes rolled back, and he stiffened

out like a board. Horrified, we watched Mother take him by the heels and immerse him, clothes and all, in the dishpan of hot water, then in the drinking pail of cold water. We thought if he wasn't dead he soon would be. But the magic formula worked and he came out of his trance. We decided then that he was like the Bible man who had been possessed by a demon, and had to have it cast out.

Harold had another immersion when he was at the first standing-on-his-feet age. He pulled himself up by a chair, then turned to the pail of hot washing water Mother had saved for scrubbing the floor, and tumbled headfirst into it. Luckily Mother heard his screams and this time she stripped off his clothes and dunked him into the barrel of flour, then wrapped him in a blanket and Father drove them to the doctor.

"The flour saved him from scars," said the doctor.

Harold recovered and for a while we spoiled him and didn't even mind eating bread made from the flour he had been dunked in.

On the farm our parents once again led their double life: Father preaching in the same churches, which had been supplied by a student when we were in Bowman; Mother starting her Sunday school class again. We discovered that we weren't the only family with a new baby. Miss Singleton and Mr. Brown had twins.

"To make up for lost time, I reckon," drawled Mr. Brown.

Our old friends seemed as glad to see us as we were to see them, and soon it seemed as if the razorstrop age had passed. But somehow the serpent did get into our Garden of Eden in the next few months.

One evening Margaret climbed on the back of our blue-black cow as she lay chewing her cud inside the corral. "I'm riding a pony," she cried.

Blue-Black was insulted, and was going to get to her feet to prove herself no pony. Up came her back legs, giving a steep incline to her back as she knelt on her front knees.

Margaret slid down the incline and fell on the barbed-wire fence, cutting her lip.

Another dash to the doctor must be made, and to keep her from crying, as she was my baby, I gave her my best doll — Bluebell with the beautiful clothes, pink coat, and straw hat.

When Margaret came home the next morning with her lip stitched together, we gave her a joyous welcome, gathering around the buggy, all trying to help her out. Then there was another accident. My precious Bluebell fell against the wheel and smashed her head. She couldn't be mended; neither could my heart, I thought. Margaret cried, and I had to let on that I didn't care, but for days I mourned my loss, which was small compared to the one of a couple of years later.

Arriving at the farm in July had made it too late to plant grain. We put in a bit of garden stuff and Father bought cattle, as beef was wanted to send to the soldiers in England. He also bought another driver called Speed, and a pony called Pinky. Pinky had pink eyes, and when her colt came, we called him Snowball.

Pinky got bitten in the stomach by a rattlesnake that fall and swelled up so that we thought that she would die. She recovered, though, so I guess the rattler thought he was biting something smaller and didn't inject a pony-size amount of poison.

With the cattle we had a bull. We called him Flag, because he was red and white. Mother always called him "the animal." The boys liked to tease him, tickling his nose with a long stick, running at him shouting, "Boo!" until he would lash his tail and paw the ground. Then they would dash for the safety of the corral.

One day John, who had been reading about bullfighters, tried to imitate one. He brought out a red, crocheted petticoat of Mother's and danced about in front of Flag. Flag lowered his head, threw dirt up over his shoulder with his front feet, then made a dash at John. John jumped to the side and returned to the attack. Flag snorted and charged again,

and this time it was John who ran. He was halfway up the corral fence when Flag's head met his stern, knocking him headfirst into the dust.

Mother witnessed this incident and took a switch to John. She was frightened enough of "the animal" without the boys' provoking him into a rage. Many a time I heard Father teasing her about her fear, usually when a farmer's wife was present.

"She's even scared of bulls when they are outside and she is inside," he'd say with a chuckle. "Once she almost killed the twins to keep them from a bull."

Then he would go on telling about the bull that escaped from a neighbor's field and wandered over to our log cabin on the Sylvan Lake homestead. It was just a month before John had been born on the Greek Bible.

"He was really quite harmless," Father said.

"If you'd heard his snorts and seen him rubbing his head against the cabin, you wouldn't have thought he was harmless," said Mother, "and I knew he could easily knock the door in."

"He was too broad to get through the door," said Father, laughing.

"What did she do?" asked Mrs. Farmer.

Father sobered up. "She grabbed the twins, who were just a year and a half old, put them in the oven, and shut the door on them," he said. "If there'd been a fire on, they'd have roasted. As it was, they were almost smothered."

"They were not," Mother denied, "and I knocked down the stovepipe and was going to put Florence up on the roof, when you rode up and chased the animal away."

Mother never got over her fear of bulls, and to have one of our own didn't help, either. Another thing Father liked to tease her about when the farmers were around was the rooster she tried to kill on that first homestead.

"It makes me sick even to remember it," said Mother. "Don't tell it."

Father did, though. It seemed that Mother had wanted to surprise him and have a rooster dinner for him when he came home after a few days' absence. Jane, a nine-year-old girl, was staying with her.

"I wish your father would come over and kill the rooster, Jane," Mother said.

"I can do it," said Jane.

"Can you catch him?" asked Mother.

Jane could, and Mother held the rooster's feet and put his neck down on the log. Little Jane picked up the heavy ax. She struck at the wriggling neck of the rooster and at the same instant Mother let go of his leg.

"And there was the rooster," said Father, as if he'd seen it himself, "running around the yard with its head half cut off."

It was Jane who caught him again and finally finished the job. Mother roasted the rooster, and Father was happily surprised, but she couldn't eat a bite.

"I know it's silly," said Mother to the women who took cutting off roosters' heads as part of their daily life, "but I still have nightmares over that poor rooster — and I still can't kill one."

We girls were in sympathy with Mother, but the boys laughed with Father. Even they could "Off with your head, rooster." Another farm chore we girls didn't like was pig-killing. When a farmer came to help Father, we girls would run upstairs and hide our heads in the packing boxes so that we would not hear our very own pig squeal. One time we kept our heads covered so long that by the time we looked out of the window the pig had been dunked in a barrel of hot water, and hung above it, now scraped and looking as pink as our new baby after a bath.

Neither did we like to see our calves branded. For years the smell of burned hair would bring back a picture of a calf, its feet tied, lying on the ground while the red-hot iron made a horseshoe brand on its side.

✤

Even school seemed to have its serpent. Our new teacher was Tony Miller. We called him "Dimples" because of the deep dimple in his chin. I was almost eleven, and I fell madly in love with him. I considered myself teacher's pet because he told Mother once that his sweetheart, who had died, had my name.

Then one sad day I fell out of love. Dimples had visitors at school — two young women who shared my infatuation. Dimples had my grade stand up for a spelling match. I wasn't much better at spelling than I was in arithmetic and when he gave me the word "stomach," I spelled it "s-t-o-m-a-c-k." The young women laughed and so did Dimples. The green-eyed monster, jealousy, shot an arrow into me, and I stopped being the model pupil.

The next day I whispered, threw spitballs, stuck my feet out in the aisle and tripped a boy passing my desk. Dimples didn't seem to catch on, thought it was an accident. So I carried my campaign into the next day, and finally Dimples sent me to stand in the corner. There I wriggled and squirmed, wondering what was going on behind me, and if I was being laughed at. I jiggled from foot to foot, then noticing a piece of chalk, I picked it up and drew two pigs on the corner blackboard, giving them exaggerated curly tails. This produced a titter, so I carried my naughtiness a step farther. I put the names of the young women over the pigs, and more titters came from behind me.

Dimples came to my side, tweaked my ear, made me erase my work of art, and sent me to my seat. I was still cross, so wrote a note to one of the big girls, saying that if Len (one of the big boys who had been my ally in fights with the children) had been at school, Dimples wouldn't have dared to send me to the corner. She gave the note to Dimples.

"Did you write this, Elsie?" he demanded.

I nodded, swallowing a lump in my throat.

"Why?"

I peeked at him through my lashes and saw his blue eyes looking cross at me and I set my mouth and wouldn't speak.

"I'll have to strap you unless you have a good reason," he said.

How could I tell him that I was jealous? I just waited, my head down. So I got the strap for the first time from a teacher. It didn't hurt my hands much, but my feelings were black and blue.

They were still discolored the next day, and I vowed I'd get my revenge, even though I was a part-time minister's kid. I did too — at noon. Dimples was playing "fox and geese" with the other pupils and tried to get me to join them. I refused. I stood with a snowball in my hand and watched him, screwing up my courage to throw it at him. By the time my courage was at the sticking point the snowball was a chunk of ice. I threw it, aiming at Dimples' stomach, as I was more intent on getting the hurt out of my heart than really hurting him. But I never was a good shot. My snowball struck him just above his eye. Blood came down his face and he put snow on it.

"Who threw that snowball?" he asked.

"Elsie," said a dozen voices.

He came over and looked at me. "Did you?" he asked, and his voice was gentle.

"Yes — but I didn't mean to h-hurt you," I said, and dissolved in tears, and he took my hand and we went into the school.

From that day on we were friends again and I loved him. Falling in love with my teachers became a habit. To cure myself I later married one of the less fortunate ones.

The snowfall was heavy that winter, and once we were snowed in the house for two days. When the blizzard stopped, Father had to shovel a path to the barn. We children thought it was fun to race down this path, which had walls above our heads.

We never knew when a blizzard would attack us. One Saturday morning Innis and I dressed up warmly and went to get Dan so that Father could drive to Red Elm to preach on Sunday morning. We had hardly left the house before the snow came down like Grandma's goose-feather pillows. We found Dan, but he was on the wrong side of the fence and we tried to find the gate. It had vanished. We decided to go home, but got turned around as we felt our way along the fence.

"We're going the wrong way," shouted Innis.

"We're not," I insisted, but Innis was sure, as he had recognized the corner of the fence as the one farthest from home.

He was only seven, but I remembered that Father said he had a direction sense, so we fought our way back against the blinding snow, tears freezing on our cheeks. There was a pain in my side and I was ready to drop when Innis grabbed my arm. "Look — there's a light!" he cried. The light blinked off and on, it seemed, but we made for it, and suddenly a dark object loomed up in front of us.

"It's Papa," said Innis. "He — he's got a lantern."

The next minute we were clinging to Father, and he was hurrying us toward the house, where every window held a light to guide us home. I was only freezing cold, but Innis' fingers and toes were frozen. Father brought in a dishpan full of snow and Mother took off his shoes and packed his feet in snow.

"The s-snow will freeze them more," sobbed Innis, but Mother insisted that he get thawed out the cold way.

"Now, now," she said, "a hero like you shouldn't cry over a snow bath after you saved your sister's life."

Innis still couldn't see the sense of a snow bath, but his parents thawed him out in the old-fashioned way.

That year we had a prairie fire. It came creeping over our farm, eating up the dry grass, skirting the plowed fields, and

headed for our house. Father hitched the horses to the plow and started to plow a guard of four to six furrows around the house and barn. Mother and we children filled every pail and pan we could with water, then took gunny sacks, soaked them, and attacked the tongues of flames that licked ahead of the main fire. We worked like Trojans, treating it like a game. But it was a game that we could not stop until the fire was out. The neighbors came, and finally, after blistering hours, we straggled back to the house, sooty and exhausted. But we had won the fight; our home was safe.

Another Saturday, Mackay and I had a horrible adventure. He was told to go after the new driver, Speed, while Father turned from farmer to minister. I slipped out of the house to follow him as I was feeling guilty for telling a lie, by keeping silent. It was my first real lie.

Father had just discovered that his razor had nicks in it and had blamed it on one of the younger ones, though I had used it to sharpen a pencil. "Has anyone been using my razor?" Father had asked.

No one answered, especially me, and I excused myself by recalling that Father had said it was better to say nothing than to say something that would hurt anyone. I knew right well that if I opened my mouth someone would be hurt – that someone being me. But if he blamed Margaret, which he finally did, she wouldn't get spanked.

So I tagged along with Mackay, just half listening to his chatter, since my conscience pricked me. We found Speed in the draw and Mackay shook the pan of oats. Speed stuck up his nose, came toward the pan, then tossed his head and backed away from Mackay's reaching hand. Again and again Mackay got the pan to Speed's nose, and again and again Speed eluded him. Finally Speed came close enough to get a mouthful of oats, and Mackay made a lunge at the flowing mane. Speed whirled around, threw up his heels, and Mackay dropped to the ground, blood spurting from his head.

I ran to him, knelt, and tried to get him to stand up. I got

blood on my hands, face, and dress. I was so sure that my twin was dead, and just as sure that God had punished me for my "keep quiet" lie.

"I'll never tell another lie, God," I cried, "if you'll only let Mackay speak to me."

God didn't answer and Mackay did not speak. Then, crying and praying, I ran home. Hysterically, I told what had happened. Mother left food cooking on the stove; Father didn't finish taking the lather off his face; followed by Florence, John, and Innis, they ran after me to fetch Mackay back.

"Go catch Dan," Father shouted at John and Innis, then with Mother crying beside him, he picked Mackay up and started home.

When we reached the hill looking down on our house, we saw smoke pouring out of the door. "The babies," shrieked Mother, whiter-faced if possible, and ran ahead.

"Wait, Elsie, don't go inside," shouted Father, trying to run with his load. But Mother wasn't hearing him. She dashed into the house. A moment later she appeared, a frying pan of pork in her hand, which was shooting up a cloud of smoke.

"It – it's not a fire," she cried, "and the babies aren't here."

The babies were found playing behind the house. Mother gave quick instructions to Florence and me to take care of them, then dressed to go to town with Father and Mackay.

Frightened, we watched them go, and debated among ourselves whether Mackay was dead or alive, and if his brains would fall out of the cut in his head. It was late when Father came home and told us that he would live.

"The doctor stitched up the wound," he said, "and Mother will bring him home in a couple of days."

His head was swathed in bandages when he came home, and for a week we pretended he was a wounded soldier. We took orders from him, and ran errands. When the band-

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

ages were removed, he had a scar across his temple, but his brains were safe, so we celebrated with a party, and gave him a new Horatio Alger book.

During that winter we had read all our books from the mission box several times, but we also spent long evenings around the kitchen table, when our homework was finished, with the Sears Roebuck catalogue. We made ABC books of the pictures. We made cardboard houses and furnished them with catalogue furniture. We would outfit ourselves with clothes, send imaginary orders for groceries, and in so doing learned a bit about the cost of living.

Then came our catalogue families. We cut out mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, children, and pets. We pasted them on cardboard and made them extra clothes from sample wallpaper or crayon-colored white paper.

When Father had put in enough time to prove the farm, Mother persuaded him to leave it. So he accepted a call to Faith, which was just twenty-five miles from our farm.

Going to Faith wasn't a complete victory for Mother, though. True, she got Father back into a town, and she thought he would give all his time to preaching. She was even willing to let him spend hours over his Greek Gospel if it would just keep him on the single track of serving God and fulfilling his mission on earth. But Father didn't sell all his cattle. With the States entering World War I, he argued that it would be better to keep the young cattle, fatten them up, and sell them at a higher price.

Our house, which was to serve as the manse, was on the edge of Faith, with a vacant farm behind it. He hired Fred and Olga Olson, who had left Sweden a year before, to look after the cattle. Fred and Olga lived in a one-room house, not ten feet from our back door. He had a separator and sold our milk and cream in the town. And Olga, a big young woman with a coronet of yellow braids, often helped Mother in our house.

Still Mother wasn't altogether pleased. " I'm beginning to

think that God will strike you down to make you see the light," she said, and her words made me think of wicked Saul struck down by a light on his way to Damascus, and hearing the voice of God saying, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." And after that Saul spent the rest of his life preaching. Faith wasn't a city, but it was a town, and perhaps someday it would be a city, I decided.

13

I WAS in my twelfth year when we went to Faith. Florence was in her fourteenth year, and a young lady I thought. Here we met people of different nationalities, different religions, and they all played a part in helping us grow up.

At school too I was growing up. My sums still didn't agree with the answers in the back of the book. As a minister's kid, I just couldn't cheat and copy the answer directly, so I rationalized. I decided to find how much my answers differed from the right one, then add or subtract the difference from mine. In this way my marks improved. A doubtful method, though it did teach me to add and subtract in my own peculiar way.

In spelling too I improved. Two new words fascinated me: "Mississippi" and "Constantinople." Our teacher had a thrilling way of teaching them. "Spell Mississippi," she would say. "M, i, double s, i, double s, i, double p, i," was our answer. "Spell Constantinople," she would say. "Can you *con*? Can you *stan*? Can you *constanti*? Can you *no*? Can you *nople*? Can you *Constantinople*?" we would singsong.

Faith saw the beginning of my writing. It began with my

first diary. Nothing great went into it but it was the beginning of putting thoughts into words which I could lock up and keep secret.

For Father it was another Greek period when he hated to sacrifice time from translations even to visit. But once again Mother was singing-happy. She rose early and worked late at washing, mending, sewing, and ironing to have time to be Mrs. Minister. As well as visiting the sick and poor, she had teas, Ladies' Aid, choir practice, and a Sunday school class.

Faith was also the Sweet Violets period of all our lives. Through him we learned that people weren't all black or white, but as varied as the rainbow. Still clinging to childhood, we reached out grasping, eager hands for new experiences, and Sweet Violets, with his big heart, silver tongue, and human weakness, colored this transition.

Sweet Violets wasn't his real name. Papa nicknamed him that one evening when he and Mother and Margaret had come out to bring me home from the farm where I had spent the night with a school friend. Halfway home we saw a runaway horse zigzagging down the road, with the buggy shafts clumping behind him. And half off the road was the buggy, with the big man slumped down in the seat. He looked up as Father stopped our horse, and Mother ran in his buggy. Margaret and I followed her, and Father drove off after the runaway horse.

"Are you hurt?" asked Mother, as Margaret and I climbed the wheel spokes and got into the buggy.

He didn't answer and Mother repeated her question. The big-shouldered, gray-whiskered man pulled at his collar with one plump, white hand splashed with brown spots, and the other fumbled with the catch of a satchel on his fat knee.

"Let me open it," said Mother, but he shook his head.

"Water, please," he said, "in the back."

The satchel catch sprang open as Mother went to the back of the buggy and the big man pulled out a vanilla bot-

tle. He raised it to his blue lips, took a long, brown swallow, and slipped it back into his satchel. I sniffed the queer odor. It certainly wasn't vanilla.

"Life's magic, my dear," he said, then stuck his fingers into his vest pocket and pulled out three peppermints. "Now for the pills of respectability." His gray eyes crinkled at the corners, and he popped a peppermint into Margaret's mouth, then one into mine, and one into his own, just as Mother appeared with a brown jug of water.

As he took a sip, I pondered over the way he had said "respectability." He had made it a soft chuckly sound, not like the sound Father gave it when he preached his sermon. When Father said "respectability," his blue eyes serious, his fair hair catching the sunlight, it had a cold, hard sound, like ice clinking in a lemonade glass. The members of his congregation sat so still when he preached about it that I couldn't even hear the rustle of their silk petticoats.

I still thought about it when Father came back and fixed the shaft and Mother talked to the old man, who looked like both my grandfathers, as well as my imagined pictures of God. Even Margaret seemed to think he looked like the Bible pictures, and called him Mr. Dod.

From his talk with Mother I learned that he was a preacher, but not like Father. He was a sort of lay preacher. He had wanted to be a real preacher, but his father had died and he had to leave college and look after the drug-store, so that his younger brothers and sisters could finish school. And when they had grown up, he still had his mother and a wife and family of his own to look after. So he just preached when other ministers were on holidays.

Sitting in the buggy, he told Mother that he hadn't preached since his wife died and since his own sickness. He just visited his two daughters. When he spoke about them, it gave me a trembly feeling inside. I would have thought they'd be glad to have their father live with them, but it seemed they passed him back and forth — just like Mrs. White said about having the Ladies' Aid, "Well, I

might as well take my turn and get it over with." Father had said it had something to do with duty, but I was never quite clear about that.

"But I'm well again," the old man told Mother. "I could preach if I had a chance." His voice went all fluttery. "I've always said I'd be happy to die preaching."

Mother gave him a smile like she gave us children when we were hurt. "Something will turn up," she said, "but in the meantime come and visit us."

His face rumpled as if he were going to cry. Then he gave a long sigh. "I'd love to, daughter," he said, jogging Margaret on his knee.

It was dark when we continued on our way home with Mr. Dod's buggy following. "What made you invite a stranger to stay with us?" asked Father. "Didn't you smell his breath?"

"Hush, the children," said Mother, then hurried on: "I smelled peppermints on his breath. He takes them because of his sick heart."

Father snorted. "Peppermints! Are you sure it wasn't sweet violets?"

Mother laughed, and I wondered why. The way he said "sweet violets" wasn't the usual way he talked about flowers; his voice was always gentle when he spoke about them, and now it was cold again. But somehow after that I always called our new friend Sweet Violets, and Margaret called him Mr. Dod.

"He's lonely," Mother was saying, when I started to listen again, and her voice had a quiver in it that made me feel choky.

"He has daughters," grumbled Father, "and he'll interfere with my studies."

Mother gave a whispering sigh, then spoke, her words like music. "He can go visiting with me and give you more time for your studies. He might preach a sermon for you too."

"Not in my pulpit," said Father quickly; then added,

"But he could visit with you."

"Perhaps you could get the mission board to let him do some supply preaching," said Mother brightly.

Father snapped the reins. "I'm afraid I couldn't take on that responsibility — not with his sick heart — and —"

"He's got pills of respectability," I said quickly.

Father grunted, and Mother, nursing Margaret, said softly, "When the Samaritan saw him, he was moved to compassion, and came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. . . ."

Father didn't speak for a minute, then he took Mother's hand. "You're right, dear," he said humbly. "I'm forgetting. Perhaps we can help him."

"I'm sure we can," Mother said, her voice a singing tone.

I got up from my box at the dashboard and climbed into Father's lap. He held me close and I watched the stars and wondered about Sweet Violets' heart and his pills of respectability which were like the peppermints Grandpa LeBeau used to give me.

✤

Having Sweet Violets living with us was like having a Grandpa in the house again. He was never too busy to tell us stories or go with Mother on her visits. Sometimes he went without her, and if it wasn't a school day, he would take one of us along. I was glad when my turn came, especially when he went to see blind Mrs. Stringer, whose husband made shoes in a room at the back of their house.

One day as we were on the way to see her, Sweet Violets got stopped on the street by Mr. Simon, the tramp man who lived in a shack on the edge of town. He was walking crooked-like, and talking so thickly that I couldn't make out his words.

"Run along to Mrs. Stringer's," Sweet Violets told me, "and I'll be along after I take Mr. Simon home."

So I went on. Mrs. Stringer's yellow cat got up from the sunny step and arched his back as I approached the door. I scratched behind her ear, then knocked on the door.

Mr. Stringer, a short man with a white, pointed beard, opened the door. "It's the minister's little girl, Mother," he said, smiling with his mouth and eye. "She's come to visit you."

I told him that Sweet Violets was coming later, then I went to Mrs. Stringer's rocking chair. She seemed very old, with a million crisscross wrinkles on her face. Her eyes were shut, but she took my hand and patted it, then fingered my hair, now in braids, and lightly touched my cheeks, all the time making happy, chuckling sounds.

"What news have you got for me today, dear?" she asked.

I remembered that Sweet Violets had said that blindness put a wall between the world of light and the world of darkness, but we could put windows in the wall, and keep them shining with pictures of life around us. So I told her that Mrs. Ross had another baby girl, though I didn't see why as she wanted a boy. Lola Bruce had married that good-for-nothing boy in the grocery store, and Mrs. Bruce said they would always be as poor as church mice; and Sally Smith was converted and going to China to live with the heathens. And I told her a lot more that I'd heard Mother and the Ladies' Aiders talking about.

"Get the child some cookies," Mrs. Stringer told her husband, and I was munching them and trying to think about something else to tell her. I debated whether she would want to hear about the scarlet woman — not the one in Hawthorne's book that I had found under Florence's pillow, like I had *East Lynne* and *St. Elmo,* but the pretty scarlet woman I had seen on our street. Some days she smelled like roses, and on others like lilies of the valley. She wore such pretty clothes, and her cheeks were very pink and so was her mouth. She didn't have a red letter on her forehead, so I didn't know she was a scarlet woman until I saw some of

the school kids following her and shouting the name at her. As she passed me I thought there were tears in her eyes, and I smiled at her. She gave me a funny look, then turned quickly into the post office.

I had just decided to tell Mrs. Stringer and ask her why the kids chased her when Sweet Violets arrived. He was carrying a bouquet of sweet peas. He said they grew up the side of Mr. Simon's shack, and he gave them to Mrs. Stringer, who buried her face in them.

On the way home I asked him why he had brought her flowers when she couldn't see them. "She can smell them, can't she?" he asked.

"Of course," I replied, "and they're the sweetest flowers I know."

"Flowers or kind words can cheer many an unhappy soul on this earth," he said, taking my hand in his big one; then he told me something he had read in a book: "Do not keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead. Fill their lives with sweetness. Speak approving, cheering words while their ears can hear them." Then he chuckled. "Mrs. Stringer may be blind, but she can feel, hear, smell, taste, and we must remember that when we visit her."

We did, and the next time we took her some of Mother's jelly, but that night as I got Margaret ready for bed, which meant undressing her, hearing her prayers, and lying beside her telling her stories until she fell asleep, then trying to dislodge her hand from the hollow of my throat to get out of bed without wakening her, I asked Mother about alabaster boxes. She told me that Mary had brought precious oil in an alabaster box to anoint Jesus' feet just before he was crucified. Mary did not wait until he was dead to give him a precious gift to show that she loved him. Then Mother said softly,

"'Give your flowers to the living,
If you love them tell them so.'"

✤

Of course Father didn't give up his visiting altogether, but Sweet Violets certainly helped out. There were days at a time when he didn't take his magic, nor his pills of respectability. He came to church with us too, and sometimes Father would let him read the Scripture lesson, and once he let him say the prayer. But his prayer was so long that Father had to cut his sermon in half, so after that Sweet Violets just read the Bible.

It was Sweet Violets who discovered the truth about our scarlet woman. He even got her to come to church once, but only once. The other women passed her by, with their noses in the air and their skirts held close, as if they were afraid that if they even brushed against her they would become soiled. Even the men acted funny. They stole quick glances at her, their faces getting red, then quickly turned away.

But not Sweet Violets. After Father had shaken hands with her, Sweet Violets walked her to her gate. That week the Ladies' Aid was at our house. While Florence and I carried in the lunch, and Mother was making the tea, we heard the ladies talking about the scarlet woman.

"She should be tarred and feathered and run out of town," said Mrs. Smith, who had bright yellow hair, a pink-and-white skin, and a body as soft as Granny's blue-and-white-tied goose-feather comforter.

"She's a hussy with her painted cheeks," said Mrs. Brown, and her tones were honeysweet, and her long nose wiggled at the end, giving her a rabbit look. "And you should hear about the parties she has. They even dance the bunny hug, to say nothing about the turkey trot, and there are always more men than women there."

"Men from the pool hall, no doubt," said Mrs. Smith, her brown eyes flashing gold specks that made me think of our barn cat, "and their flighty women friends."

"I hear that even the married men go to *that* woman's

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

parties without their wives," piped up little Mrs. Green, then winked.

Then the president noticed that Florence and I were watching them. "Little pitchers have big ears," she said, and Mother, bringing in the tea, told us to take Margaret and Harold outside to play.

Not long after this Sweet Violets went to visit *that* woman. He phoned Mother and asked her to come over at once as *that* woman was sick in bed. Mother put on her hat, asked Olga to keep an eye on us, and hurried over. Later we heard the whole story.

Our scarlet woman was ill, very ill. The doctor had just been leaving when Sweet Violets arrived, and he told him that she had consumption and was in the last stages of it. She was bleeding from her mouth.

"She should be in a hospital," the doctor said, "but she won't go, and she needs nursing. There are no nurses in town."

So Sweet Violets phoned Mother, and between the two of them they nursed her through her last two weeks of life. It seemed that her pink cheeks weren't painted. They were part of her disease. She had been a secretary in Chicago and had been advised to go to the country to live. She was an orphan, and had a little money left by her parents that she had saved for a rainy day.

"I looked at a map," she said, "and when I saw Faith, the name did something for me. I thought if I had faith and went to a town called Faith, perhaps I'd get better, even though I knew I wouldn't." She laughed shakily. "It was silly, I know. A warmer climate might have kept me alive longer. But I thought in a small town I could make friends and my last days would be happy." Then tears rolled down her cheeks. "From the first no one was friendly. They seemed suspicious of me. They gossiped about me. Even the children mocked me in the streets. But I got so I didn't care. I was so lonely and frightened. I had to have people around

me, no matter who they were." She squeezed Mother's hand. "They were kind to me, even if they weren't the best people."

When the town heard that she was dying they sent food, flowers, and nice little notes. "Oh, if only they'd come sooner!" she'd sob, and would let only Mother and Sweet Violets look after her.

When Mother came home, she would wash herself well and gargle her throat. Father would fuss over her, asking her if she were sure that she was not overdoing it, getting too tired. She would reassure him, then tell him about her day and how she felt that people's unkindness had driven our sick woman to doing what she had done, whatever that was. Father looked as if he felt miserable about the whole thing too.

"How can people be so cruel?" he said. "It is as if God made the country, man made the city, and the devil made the small town."

Our scarlet woman died. The church was packed and her coffin was covered with flowers. Sweet Violets, with tears in his eyes, read the Bible text: "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."

Then Father, his face white and his eyes colder than I'd ever seen them, preached the sermon.

The part of the sermon I remembered longest was the bit about gossip and stinkweed. After telling the scarlet woman's sad story, he spoke in parables like Jesus. He told about a woman who went from house to house gossiping about her neighbors until everyone became enemies, and friendliness was gone from their hearts. One day the troublemaker told her minister what she had told someone else. He questioned her, and when he learned that she had been gossiping in the same manner in every home, he told her to go home and take a gallon of stinkweed seed and cast them over the field adjoining her house, then come back to him.

She did as he instructed, then returned. "Go home now

and gather up the stinkweed seeds, then come back and I will pray God and ask him to forgive the harm you have done," he said.

"But that is impossible," cried the woman. "No one can gather up those seeds I tossed to the winds."

"No," said the minister. "No one can gather up the seeds you have sown, and no one can undo the mischief you have done by your gossip."

Father said a great deal more. "I would rather have one cheap bouquet while I am alive," he said softly, "than a bushel of roses on my coffin when I am dead."

He ended his sermon with a poem that he later had us learn:

"If you are tempted to reveal
A tale to you someone has told
About another, make it pass,
Before you speak, three gates of gold:
These narrow gates: First, 'Is it true?'
Then, 'Is it needful?' In your mind
Give truthful answer. And the next
Is last and narrowest, 'Is it kind?'
And if to reach your lips at last
It passes through these gateways three,
Then you may tell the tale, nor fear
What the result of speech may be."

We older children learned that one, and Mother taught Anne and Margaret the nursery rhyme:

"If your lips would keep from slips
Five things observe with care:
To whom you speak; of whom you speak;
And how and when, and where."

After the service Mother still wept. "Don't cry, Mamma," said Florence, "the pretty lady has just gone through the gate to heaven."

"I know, dear," said Mother, wiping her eyes. "I'm not

weeping because she is dead, but because we let her be so unhappy in this world."

❖

This experience so impressed me that I never indulged in gossiping. I didn't even tell or tattle about the pretty maid with whom I spent the night. Mr. and Mrs. Stone had to leave town and asked Mother to let me stay with their maid Lola, so that she wouldn't be frightened at being alone.

I was thrilled to be the company of such a pretty girl. She was almost as pretty as the long-curled Mary Pickford, whom we had just seen at our first movie. In the movie Mary, while attending a girls' school, had posed for the head of a draped statue. When the statue was unveiled, it was discovered to be a nude and the school matron was going to expel Mary. But she married the sculptor and so the movie had a happy ending.

Lola combed her hair out the night I stayed with her. She had just tied it with a bow and put on a pretty low-necked, sleeveless dress when we had visitors. Another pretty woman and two handsome young men came to call. They laughed and talked and had drinks. I had one too – grape juice – but it wasn't like theirs, which smelled like Sweet Violets' magic. Finally I was sent off to bed with a handful of chocolates.

I lay in bed romancing about them. Finally it sounded as if they had left, though I still heard Lola talking. She tiptoed upstairs and came into my room with one of the young men. They spoke to me, but I pretended to be asleep. They whispered some more, then left.

A few minutes later I heard them laughing and talking in the next bedroom. I decided they were playing games on the bed like we kids did on rainy days, making tents out of the quilts and pretending we were Indians.

The next morning the man was gone and Lola was as pretty and gay as ever. Before I left, she gave me the rest of

the chocolates and asked me not to tell that she had had company or Mrs. Stone might fire her.

"Cross my heart, I promise," I said, as I didn't want her to lose her job.

She kissed me. "You're a good little girl," she said, "and someday you must stay with me again."

I never did, and it wasn't long after that that she left town. I hoped that she didn't think that I had tattled on her – not that I realized I had anything to tell.

That year I almost became a scarlet woman myself, though I seemed to be the only one ignorant of it. One of the schoolboys wrote me a note. It was full of funny words that I'd never seen. I made out that he wanted me to wait after school and he would take me someplace to do something. I was pondering over the queer words when my teacher saw me, and took the note away.

She was a pale woman, with blond hair and blue eyes, and she wore pretty waists and long skirts. Sometimes she pinned flowers on her waist, and we liked her, though she had one bad habit. Every time we whispered she marked it on a piece of paper, and after four we got a ruler whack across our knuckles for every time we were caught. I always seemed to get caught. But now, as she read my note, her face went pink.

Then, to my surprise, she grabbed me by the arm and marched me out of the room and upstairs to the principal's office. I was so frightened that my knees felt like rubber. I was scared of the principal. He was a large man, with hairy arms that showed beneath the stiff white cuffs he wore. I had wondered if he were hairy, like a monkey, all over. When he read my note and looked at me, his black eyes seemed to shoot at me from each side of his square nose. I wanted to run. I grabbed Miss Mathews' hand.

"Do you know what this is about?" he barked.

"I – I don't know all the words," I said, ashamed of my ignorance.

"Who wrote it?"

"T-Tommy," I stammered.

"Tommy White," said Miss Mathews.

"Fetch him," said the principal.

Miss Mathews started to leave, and I stammered, "C-can I go too?"

The principal plucked at his lower lip. "I'm sure the child doesn't know what it's all about, Sir," said Miss Mathews.

"Take her along with you then," said the principal.

She did, and sent Tommy upstairs. There was quite an ado about this affair. Tommy's parents, and mine too, were brought to the school. But it seemed to me that Tommy was the winner; he got a holiday from school, being suspended for a week.

I was well on in my teens before I learned what the words in my note meant. Perhaps that was because the children in Father's congregation were afraid, as a rule, to tell us vulgar words for fear we would tell Mr. Minister and he would tell God.

There were many other people in this growing-up year that we met, friends and acquaintances of Mr. and Mrs. Minister. We became aware that all men did not worship in the same way. Father, being in a Greek period, had discovered that the Roman Catholic priest, Father Kelly, was a Greek scholar too. They visited back and forth.

One day we met the black-robed praying man outside his house, the upstairs of which was his chapel. He and Father went inside to argue over the translation of a certain verse, and I was left to amuse myself. Finally I opened the chapel door and went up the stairway and found myself in a new world. Fascinated, I stood before the altar with its lighted candles and flowers. I was enchanted by the statue of the Virgin Mary holding Baby Jesus in her arms. I gingerly touched the baby's toes, and I was sure that Mary smiled at

me. I wished our church was fixed up pretty like this one, where even the air was the perfume of flowers. I stayed there, lost in wonder, until I heard Father calling me.

"Where were you?" he asked, as I appeared.

"Up in the pretty church," I said, "with Mary and Jesus."

Father smiled, and Father Kelly patted my head. "Come again," he said.

I promised him I would, and I often slipped into the chapel after that, even if it was just for a few minutes.

In Faith too we met the Seventh-day Adventists, who claimed that we were observing the wrong day of worship. Two of them came to preach, both handsome young men.

"Saturday is the day God made holy," they said, and I was worried.

Had Father really made a mistake in saying Sunday was the holy day? I just had to find out, so I asked him, and he explained it. He told us that the very early Church came from the Jews, and it was only later that the Gentiles were admitted through the preaching of Paul. The Jews had worshiped on the seventh day of the week, keeping it as their day of rest.

"But, according to the early Christian records, the first Christians met and worshiped on the first day of the week," said Father.

"Why was the day changed?" I asked.

"The resurrection of Jesus took place on the first day of the week, according to the records of the apostles," said Father. "So it seems reasonable to suppose that was why the first day of the week became holy. It was the day on which Christ had risen from the dead to tell the people that there was a life after death." Then he smiled. "But I guess God doesn't mind what day we choose to keep holy, as he would like us to keep all days holy."

That satisfied us. In Faith too we knew a Christian Scientist. She came to our church sometimes and worked in the Ladies' Aid. Like us, she believed in God, but she left

her sickness for him to look after. It seemed a lot to expect of God when he had made doctors to help him out, we thought, but we liked Mrs. Kane.

She had a daughter Anne's age, who looked like a doll. Her skin was waxy-white and her fair hair was always in ringlets. She seemed as fragile as a doll too, and never played any rough games. One day I was with Mother when we met Mrs. Kane on the street wheeling a baby carriage. Her face was very white.

"How old is the baby?" asked Mother, peeking into the carriage.

"He's three days old today," said Mrs. Kane.

"Three days!" gasped Mother. "And you're out wheeling him!"

Mrs. Kane smiled. "Of course," she said. "I'm feeling fine, and I can't stand staying in bed."

We went on and met another woman, and Mother told her about Mrs. Kane. "I'm worried," Mother said. "She'll ruin her health."

"To say nothing about her figure being ruined," said the other woman.

I thought I understood then. Mother had a perfect figure, even after eight children, and she always stayed in bed for two weeks. But, as it turned out, Mrs. Kane had got up too early. The next day her husband phoned Mother and said she was sick. Mother went right over and Mrs. Kane had a high fever.

"It's childbirth fever," said Mother. "My mother had it after the birth of her last child."

"Is it serious?" asked Mr. Kane.

"Call the doctor at once," Mother evaded, as she knew that in most cases this fever meant death. Grandma had recovered, but she had been crippled for life.

"She says she won't have a doctor," said Mr. Kane.

"You call him or I will," said Mother, and he did, and Mother called friends to come and take the children.

For three weeks Mrs. Kane was ill, her temperature going up each day to a hundred and four, then down, with sweats that soaked the sheets. A nurse was brought in from Minneapolis, but finally Mrs. Kane was taken to the hospital and operated on to remove the abscess the poison had formed. She lived, but she was still an invalid when we left Faith.

Mrs. Minister should have been a nurse, judging by the number of times she got called away from her own big family to help the sick. There was the time when our Roman Catholic boy friend was bitten by a rattlesnake. He and another friend had gone out to the creek where Mackay and John were herding our cows. They decided to go swimming.

Just as Don went to dive into the creek, he felt a burning on his heel as if a bee had stung him. But once in the water he did not feel any pain. When he came out, the pain began again and he saw that his foot was swelling; then he noticed the two teeth marks.

"Rattlesnake," he shouted. "I've been bitten. Get your knife, Mackay, and cut my foot."

Mackay opened his jackknife but when it came to slashing Don's foot, he hesitated, getting white about the mouth.

"Go on, go on," screamed Don, "or I'll do it myself."

Mackay gritted his teeth and made a jab at the foot, and blood spurted out. "You — you'll have to get to the doctor," he said.

They pushed Don up on Mackay's horse, and Mackay got on with him. They started to town, and John and the other boy followed. At the doctor's door Don fell in an unconscious heap, and the doctor worked on him, then drove him home.

Mackay and John brought the news home, and that night Mother went to sit with Don's mother. All night he lingered between life and death, his leg swollen and purple.

Don's mother knelt by his bed, fingering her rosary, saying her prayer beads. Mother knelt beside her, praying silently. The priest and the doctor, who had told Mother that Don couldn't live, joined them. As the sun rolled over the

horizon, they noticed a difference in Don's condition. The doctor looked at him, then turned to the mothers.

"He'll live," he said, then smiled. "Thanks to your prayers, I am sure."

Father went for Mother and she came home, pale and weary, but filled with a glow of happiness that I now know was because she had been able to share the victory over death that their prayers had won.

"But why did you go? She was a Roman Catholic," a woman said to Mother.

"Don't be silly," said Mother. "She was a mother, as I am."

We asked Father how prayers could save Don, and he just smiled and said, "'More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.'"

Don came to see us often after that, and we never tired of hearing about his ride to town, which he said was a nightmare of red, blue, and green snakes reaching out to pull him off the horse. We likened it to Paul Revere's ride.

Once when we children were puzzling over people with different religions and churches Father tried to explain it so that we could understand.

"God knows goodness wherever he sees it," he said, "and all men want to reach God. They just take different roads to heaven. As long as people believe in God and do his will on earth, he will not worry about the name they call their religion." That answer still satisfies me.

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

14

SWEET VIOLETS went to visit his daughters after Thanksgiving, and we all missed him, though he promised to come back in the spring. Later, when Father had pneumonia, I wished that he were there so that he could get a chance to preach.

In the meantime there was the school Christmas concert. "The Courtship of Miles Standish" was dramatized, and Florence was the fair Priscilla, whom John Alden loved even as he proposed to her for Miles Standish. Poor John, we thought, but became happy again when John won Priscilla.

I took part in a pantomime, "The Boston Tea Party." I was one of the rebels who threw tea overboard to express my defiance of the English king. I was just as defiant as any little American.

After Christmas Father got pneumonia. He had never had even a headache or a toothache in his whole life, and he was a very impatient patient. He was very sick and Mother nursed him. He didn't want her out of his sight and would lie for hours holding her hand.

One day when he was near the crisis he looked at her. "Molly," he said huskily, "if I die, promise me you won't marry again."

"Marry again!" exclaimed Mother. "What a thought!"

"Promise," he said.

"I don't believe in deathbed promises," said Mother, "and you're not going to die."

Father tossed restlessly. "I might," he said, "so promise."

"Do you think any man is going to ask a woman with eight children to be his wife?" She bent over to kiss him. "You flatter me."

Father sort of smiled and fell asleep, but when he wakened he asked her again to promise not to marry. Mother laughed, though there were tears on her lashes. "You wouldn't take out life insurance," she said, "so what else can I do?"

This made Father so cross that he immediately started to get well, which was why Mother wouldn't promise. For years Father declared he would never have acted so foolish unless he was delirious. But the mention of a deathbed promise always recalls the picture of Mother sitting by his bed, holding his hand while he tried to get her to promise not to marry, even to get someone to support her eight children.

He was a long time getting strong again, but when spring came he practically lived outside. He helped Fred with the cattle, planted a big garden including corn and sunflower patches, and mended fences. He went for long drives in the country to visit the congregation of his country church, and that was how we came to know the Indian woman married to a white man. He had once been a fur trader and had married the daughter of an Indian chief. "She's a princess," Mother told us, "and was educated in a convent."

She was a thin, very tall woman, and her hair and eyes were coal-black. Her cheeks were gaunt and she had a breathless way of talking, slipping from English to her own language and back again. They had a beautiful home, but except in very, very cold weather the princess slept in a tent.

"She's consumptive," Mother said, when we asked her why.

The princess had two daughters, one sixteen and the other eighteen. The older one was as fair as Florence and the younger one even darker than her mother. They wore pretty clothes and we met them when they came home from the convent school. They were always together, and made beautiful lace, and gave Mother yards of it. Many years later I wore some of it on my wedding garments, then put it on my daughter's baby clothes.

We were intrigued with the difference in the coloring of the sisters. How could they be sisters? How could one be so dark, the other so fair? Did the fair one mind her sister being dark? Did the dark one cry to be fair? She must, I thought, in my acceptance of the belief that everyone wanted to be white. Never did it cross my mind that the girls' Indian relatives would prefer the dark sister. At home we had never been taught racial or religious intolerance, but I had, like other children, absorbed it from my playmates.

Neither did it cross my mind that inside, in her heart and spirit, the fair Indian girl might have the feelings of her mother's people, and the dark sister have the feelings of her father's people.

Most of the real Indians we had seen so far had disappointed us. It was hard to believe that they had ever been the romantic, nomadic people of our storybooks. The fat squaws, in their shapeless print dresses and gaudy shawls, shuffled along the board sidewalks and looked into the windows just like our own mothers. But they carried their babies in board cradles that hung down their backs. We would tiptoe up behind them and wave at the babies, who looked at us with button-black eyes.

The Indian girls and boys, in their American clothes, tittered in the same way we did. The truth was that we were more than disappointed in them – that is, until the Indian Fair.

The day before the Fair, Indians approached the town from every direction. They came on horseback, in wagons, in buggies, and on foot. Their cone-shaped tents covered the rising ground outside the town like mushrooms. The women gathered twigs and cow chips to make a fire, and when night came these fires burned like orange beacons and we went to sleep to the throbbing of Indian drums.

When we reached the Fair the next day, the dances had begun. At the first glance I was a bit scared and grabbed Father's coattail as the picture-book Indians cavorted about. Their faces were painted with streaks of red, yellow, and blue. Their bodies looked bare, but were covered with tights that were also streaked with paint. They wore beaded leggings, arm bands, and feathered headpieces that trailed down their backs. Around and around they circled in a wild dance while the painted-faced drum beaters pounded on skin-covered instruments.

The squaws, dressed in embroidered skins and beaded headbands, formed a half circle, making a colorful backdrop for the dancers.

Shivers ran through my body, but I couldn't take my eyes from them. After the dancing was over, the warriors wrestled, did long jumps, high jumps, hurdles, and lifted heavy objects to show their strength. They received prizes too and feasted. When the sun went down, they resumed their dancing and singing. I lay awake listening to them, hoping that in the morning Father would take us back to see them. But when the sun rose the tents were gone. If it hadn't been for the ashes of their campfires, I would have thought it had all been a dream.

At Faith too we saw the Barnum & Bailey Circus. The boys earned money to go to it by helping to look after the elephants. They carted water and washed them with a mop on the end of a long pole. John tried to climb up one of the leathery legs and the elephant filled his squirter with the wash water and showered him, and that ended his fa-

miliarity, to say nothing about their keeper shouting, "You kid, there, watch out or Flap Ears will squeeze the guts out of you."

Later we saw Flap Ears lift a grown man up, curving his trunk around the man's body. But he didn't squeeze him, just put him down again gentle-like.

There had been no argument about our not seeing the circus because we were the minister's kids. Father and Mother came with us, and we saw everything from the giant to the midgets, the latter no bigger than Margaret, who was almost four. We saw dancing girls, tightrope walkers, gypsy fortunetellers, snakes, and queer distorted-looking people like the fat woman whose arms and legs looked like blown up balloons and whose neck was a series of chins. They all shook when she laughed, but somehow her laugh didn't make you feel happy. There was an armless man who wrote with his feet, and other queer people who gave you a wobbly, bubbly feeling inside.

There were happy things too — clowns who joked with us, bounced around the tent like rubber balls, and did all sorts of tricks like pulling a gold piece out of your ear. There were ponies, real ones that monkeys rode; and there were monkeys riding on bicycles and walking on stilts. And there was a pony merry-go-round that we patronized until our last cent was spent.

I think I got the biggest thrill out of the dancing ladies and the tightrope walkers. They were painted up like dolls and wore hardly any clothes. They smiled and blew kisses, and one girl blew a kiss right at Father. He smiled, though Mother dug her elbow into his ribs.

We saw our first plane at the circus too. It was a small affair, and the pilot wore goggles and a helmet. He flew the plane for about a half mile, then came back, and when he touched the ground several men ran out and caught the wings of the plane to stop it. To us it was as much a freak as the two-headed calf.

After the circus was gone, we children tried the tightrope walking, but after a few skinned knees and elbows we decided that we would have to join a circus to become experts.

"Someday I will," I told my twin.

"Me too," he said.

*

After the Fourth of July, which we celebrated as enthusiastically as our American friends at a picnic which lasted into the night with fireworks, Sweet Violets came back to visit us. At the same time Innis got a job herding Mr. Schmidt's cows, much to the disgust of Mackay and John, who were older. But Father said he needed the older boys to help Fred.

Innis was just eight years old. Wearing a miniature cowboy outfit with chaps, a pistol at his belt, and a big hat, he went to live with a German family. He strutted around full of pride and was the envy of his older brothers. He earned money too — twenty-five cents a day. On Saturdays he would ride home on an old gray gelding, first going to the bank to deposit his check.

Usually the bank had closed its doors, but he would strut up and bang it with his tiny fist until the manager would come down from his rooms above the bank. He would take a look at Innis, then pretend that his pistols frightened him and say, "This chap looks pretty dangerous, so I guess I'd better cash his check." Then he would give Innis a big silver dollar and change. Back on his horse, Innis would gallop home and put his money in his piggy bank. Then he would spend the week end arguing war with us.

This war was our first outside of a history book and it was very confusing. The Bible said it was wrong to kill. Yet Canada, England, and the States were at war with Germany. Born in Canada, we thought the Germans were in the wrong. But living with Germans, whom he liked very much, Innis was sure the Germans were right and the English wrong. He even came to blows over it with John.

We were still confused. It wasn't much use telling ourselves that our soldiers were sent out to kill bad men, in spite of the Bible's saying, "Thou shalt not kill." We knew the German children thought their soldiers were sent out to kill bad men too. I didn't like the idea of anyone being killed, but thought that perhaps the enemy were like the bad giants and just had to be killed. I tried to tell Innis that maybe the bad men on both sides would get killed and the good ones be left.

"The only good Englishmen are dead ones," he said, and rode back to his German friends.

At home we took turns herding our cattle. Mackay and John did it most of the time and demanded wages like Innis. Florence helped Mother in the house, sweeping, tidying, making beds, and keeping the windows washed of Margaret's and Harold's fingerprints. Of course Anne and I had chores too – the everlasting dishes.

We were still as much at home on horseback as on the ground. I remember one herding day in particular. Anne, almost seven, and myself mounted the pinto pony and took the cattle to pasture about a mile from home. It was one of those perfect days when the sun warmed us and filled the air with perfume from the wild roses. We pushed back our sunbonnets and let the sun shine on our hair.

We were happy, and Sweet Violets said he would ride out again and bring us our lunch. I wondered if he would bring his magic and peppermints as he had done the last time. When we came to the creek, we tied up the pony and let the cows roam. For a while we watched them, fascinated to see their tongues twist around the long blades of green grass, only to swallow it whole to go to their stomachs.

"I wouldn't want to be a cow with four sick stomachs," said Anne.

I sat down under a tree and laughed at her. After we got cooled off in the shade, we decided to gather rose petals so that we could make some beads for Mother.

"Keep a watch out for rattlesnakes," I warned Anne, as we roamed along the creek. Once when I'd been out with Mackay, he had gone swimming and I watched him from the bank. And even though rattlesnakes are said not to like water, I saw one swimming behind him. I shouted to warn him, and he swam like mad for the shore. We didn't see where the snake went.

We didn't see any snakes as we gathered rose petals, but each rosebush looked more beautiful than the last and we wandered on until I saw a bush across the creek that seemed more beautiful than any other.

"Let's cross the creek," I said.

Anne looked doubtfully at the deep water, but I walked on until I found a spot where the two sides curved toward each other as if they wished to join hands and stop the rushing stream.

It looked like an easy jump, and I was just ready to take it when I saw Sweet Violets riding toward it. I waved and shouted and he waved back. Then I leaped across the stream. I landed safely and turned to give Anne a helping hand. She jumped, made a grab at me, then slipped, and we both fell into the deep water.

Clinging to each other, we went down and our rose petals floated on the water above us. It could have been only for a minute, but every naughty thing I had ever done raced through my mind. I was sure we were drowning and I wondered how long it would be before we knew whether we were in heaven — or the bad place. Then I didn't want to die. I began to struggle and we came up. I tried to push Anne to the shore, but she clutched me about the neck and we both went under again. This time I was sure we were going to die and I had a burning pain in my chest. Then I felt hard arms around me and came up to the surface again.

Choking and spitting water, I saw Sweet Violets' face. It was purple where his wet beard didn't cover it. He had us in his arms and pushed us to the shore and we crawled up. He

came half out of the water, then fell forward on his face, and his breath made choky sounds.

"Help me, Anne," I cried.

Choking and sobbing for Mother, Anne helped me pull at Sweet Violets' arms. We got him the rest of the way out of the water and turned him over. His eyes rolled up and frightened me. I search in his pocket for his magic but all I found was peppermints, which I gave to Anne to hold, as he always took them after his magic.

Then I thought of the bag on his saddle. The last time he'd come out he had carried the magic with the lunch. His horse was on the other side of the stream, the reins over his head, as always when he waited for Sweet Violets to come back.

"Stay with him, Anne," I said, and jumped back to the other side. I climbed up the stirrup and untied the lunch bag. The magic was there all right and I carried it back. I thought of throwing the bottle over, but I was afraid of breaking it, so I jumped with it in my hands. I just made the edge, but the bottle fell in the bush, and though my legs slid into the water, I grabbed the bush and pulled myself up.

I spilled a lot of the magic getting the cork out of the bottle, then held it to his mouth, which was partly open. More of it trickled down his chin than went inside, but he got some of it, and in a moment he opened his eyes and looked at us.

"You — you all right?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, and turned to Anne. "Give him the pills of respectability, Anne."

Anne started to cry again. "I — I ate them," she said.

"Anne ate your pills of respectability," I told him.

He smiled and tried to sit up. "Don't cry, Anne," he said. "I don't need them." Then he lay down again. "Just let me rest awhile."

"I'll go home and get Papa," I said.

At first Sweet Violets didn't want me to leave, but he finally agreed and I jumped across the creek and got my pony and rode home for Father. Father rode back with me

and helped Sweet Violets to mount his horse and led it home. Sweet Violets stayed in bed for three days, but after that he was fine. Father was so happy about his saving us that he sat right down and wrote to the mission board to see if there was a church where Sweet Violets could preach.

While he waited for the answer, Sweet Violets continued to visit his old friends and went to church with us. Then one Sunday when Father did not get back from his country church in time for the evening service in town, Mother had a bright idea.

"Let's go over to the church," she said, and her voice had a chuckle sound like it did when she had a little joke of her own. "You can announce the hymns and make the prayers. Then if George David doesn't come, you can preach your sermon."

Sweet Violets had been holding my hand. He dropped it. His face puckered queerly, his shaggy brows almost meeting, his eyes squeezed shut just like baby Harold when he had a gas pain.

"You've nothing to fear, my dear," said Mother. "The people all love you."

Just when I thought he was going to be ill, his face smoothed out, and his shining cheeks became as rosy as polished apples. He turned toward the stairway.

"I'll need my own Bible then," he said.

A few minutes later he came back with the Bible and I saw him edge a peppermint to his cheek with his tongue. I cuddled my hands in his and followed Mother out of the gate. That was the fourth peppermint he'd had since morning, I decided, and he'd given me only three.

Mother gave a hasty look down the street as she went up the church step. Still there was no sign of Father. The choir fluttered in from the side doors and settled down with rustling skirts.

As we walked toward the front pew, where we always sat, I looked at the people I knew so well. Somehow they always

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

looked different in church. I giggled, and Mother gave me a reproving shake of her head, and pushed me ahead of her into our pew. I'd just decided that people put on masks to come to church, and that's why they seemed like strangers.

Sweet Violets strode up to the pulpit, sat down, and bowed his head. Then he stood up, glanced at the numbers that hung on the wall to the right of the pulpit, and announced the first hymn.

I was excited. I didn't want Father to get back, for then Sweet Violets would have a chance to preach a sermon. I kept watching the lowering sun, and a robin that sang from a branch of the maple outside. Then it was time to take up the missionary collection. I gave my full attention to it. I'd noticed before that it was always a race between Mr. Parsons and Mr. Tompkins to see who would reach the collection plate first. Whichever one did grabbed the sober-green padded plate, and left the bright-red one for the other.

I liked Mr. Tompkins best because he owned the store and often gave me a stick of candy, and I had to choke off another giggle when he got the green plate a hand's length ahead of Mr. Parsons. But my breath went down the wrong channel and I couldn't stop coughing until the collection had been taken up to the front, and the stiff black backs of Mr. Parsons and Mr. Tompkins waited for Sweet Violets to bless the offering. His deep, throbbing voice sent thrills down my back, and I wished I'd put in the other penny that I had held back for candy instead of giving it to the poor heathens in Africa.

Then Mary Lemon sang a solo, but I listened to the robin and wished Sweet Violets would get his sermon started before Father arrived. He did too, just as I heard our buggy rattling down the street. Sweet Violets leaned over the pulpit, waited a moment, his gray eyes flitting from one upturned face to the next. Then he opened his Bible and read,

"'And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.'"

He took a deep breath. "Friends, to me, this is one of the greatest verses in the Bible." His voice went on and on, sinking and rising, and even the robin had hushed its singing, and not a skirt rustled. I peeked around and all the people had taken off their masks.

"Let us look into our lives, and the lives of others with the kindly eyes of charity," Sweet Violets was saying.

Father had said that charity was love. "It's more than love," Mother had explained. "You must have understanding and sympathy for everyone you know, whether they are dear or not." That hadn't made it much clearer, so I listened to Sweet Violets.

"Charity is mercy," Sweet Violets' voice sank almost to a whisper, then rose to a peak. "God has shown mercy to every soul. He sees the little sparrow fall . . ."

Father came into the church and joined us in our pew, but I hardly knew he was there. Sweet Violets' words poured forth faster and faster. Suddenly his voice began to waver, his words blurred, became a mumble. He reached for his handkerchief, mopped his brow, then swayed on his feet, and sat down in his chair, where he slumped forward, his chin on his chest.

"He's been drinking," Father whispered.

Mother was on her feet and up the aisle before anyone could move. Father followed, and Florence and I after him.

"Please keep your seats," Father said to the congregation, then bent over Sweet Violets. His nostrils quivered and he looked at Mother, started to say something, then stopped as the doctor came up from his back seat.

I heard Sweet Violets give a deep sigh and saw Mother's lips trembling as she wiped moisture from his forehead with her lace handkerchief. He mumbled something about magic and respectability. Reminded, I felt in his vest pocket and took out a peppermint. But when I tried to give him one, he turned his face away.

"No use now," he muttered.

" Don't say that, my dear," said Mother, and I slipped the peppermint into my mouth and toed the hole in the carpet as the doctor helped Father get Sweet Violets to his feet.

The next evening Sweet Violets and Mother sat in the shade of our house. All day the house had been full of company. Everyone whom Sweet Violets had visited had come to inquire about him, and he told them he was going away again.

Now Mother and Sweet Violets sat looking at each other in a deep, still way. They did not see me at the corner of the house.

" You will be happy," Mother said softly, " promise me."

" I don't know. I'll never preach again. I know it now, and I've no one to blame but myself." His face got all crumpled-looking.

" Maybe not from the pulpit, my dear." Mother took his hand in hers. " But you'll preach until the day you die. Why, to all those dear people who came to see you today, your visits have been sermons."

But Sweet Violets shook his head. " Don't try to be kind, my daughter," he said, and his voice made my feet so heavy I couldn't have moved.

Mother patted his hand. " You've told me yourself that people need someone sympathetic to listen to their troubles without trying to reform them."

Sweet Violets gave her a startled look.

" And you're right," Mother went on, her voice like music. " We all need someone to tolerate our bitterness, our failings, and even our meanness. Someone who can discover what makes us that way." Her hand was on Sweet Violets' arm now. " Anyone can preach, but it takes someone who has lived and suffered to reawaken hope, or pluck out the sting of an old bitterness."

While Mother talked, Sweet Violets' face smoothed out, and before she had finished his shoulders were straightened.

" My dear," he said in a surprised voice, " you're right. I see

things clearly now. All the time that I've wanted to preach I've been thinking of glory for myself, and not of the best way to bring happiness to others. My daughter, you've given me a new magic."

His voice made me want to float away. I didn't wait to hear any more. Mother had given him a new magic. Perhaps he should have new pills of respectability. So I went into the study to find Father's Greek Testament. I would give it to him and make him respectable like Father. I had just got it off the shelf when Father came in.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

I told him and he took it from my hands. "He can't read Greek," he said, "so let's just give him something else for a going-away present."

❋

Sweet Violets left us, but we were to see him again when he heard that Margaret had drowned. Never again would I enter a room and see her golden brown head bent over a doll; or hear her silver laughter; or feel her hand nestled in the hollow of my throat.

It was the first real tragedy in our family, and though we knew that she was an angel, it did not lessen our own lonesomeness.

The morning of the tragedy dawned bright and clear. Mother had just got up after three days in bed with her "tired heart," as Father called it. She had brushed Margaret's curls and put a pink ribbon on them, and let her go with Fred to deliver the milk and cream in town. At noon Father said he and Mackay were going to fetch a load of hay. Margaret coaxed to go with them.

"You've been away all morning," said Mother.

"But I want to go with Papa too," said Margaret.

"Let the child come," said Father, so Mother changed her dress and let her go. That was the last time we saw her alive.

They were late getting back and Fred, who had been up town again, told Florence and me that he had heard that Mackay had ridden into town for the doctor. We were worried and didn't want to frighten Mother because of her bad heart. We had just decided that I would ride out on the pony to find them when the doctor's car drove up.

Mother came to the door and took one look at Father, wet and pale, sitting in the back seat of the car with Margaret lifeless in his arms. She cried out and clung to the door. The doctor ran and caught her as she fell. Father carried Margaret into the parlor and laid her on the table. Then he went to help the doctor with Mother. She too looked dead.

" Elsie, darling," he said, and his ragged voice made shivers go all through me. " Speak to me. Come back! We need you. I need you." He bowed his head and groaned. " Oh, my God, how I need her! " A tremor went through him and the doctor looked at me standing in the doorway, wide eyed and frightened.

" Come, come," he said, putting his hand on Father's shoulder. " Your wife is going to be all right. Go and change your clothes."

Father raised his head, kissed Mother on the forehead, then got to his feet. Almost as white as Mother, he staggered to the stairs. Feeling frightened and uncertain, I followed him. He was lying across his bed, his face covered with his hands, his whole body shaking with sobs. I tiptoed away, and it wasn't until Mackay came back with the horses that we learned what had happened. He was telling Olga and Fred, and we crowded around him. His voice was an octave higher than usual and his eyes were red from crying.

They had just been coming home with the load of hay, passing the big pond where the road dipped down to the edge, when Margaret, who had been beside Mackay, decided to sit beside Father.

" I'm scared," she'd said. " I want Papa."

She started toward him and just then the hayrack tipped.

The hay, Margaret, Mackay, and Father were thrown into the pond. Father and Mackay could swim and they came to the surface. "Margaret didn't come up," said Mackay. "Papa dived under the hay to find her. I waited and waited – oh, so long — then his head came up, but he didn't have Margaret. So he took the reins from the horses and tied them around his waist. He told me to count to fifty and if he hadn't come up to pull him out."

Mackay stopped to blow his nose and big, comfortable Olga took his hand in hers as he went on talking. "I – I was just going to pull when he brought Margaret up. He put her on the grass and told me to jump on Dan and ride for the doctor."

So Mackay had ridden to town and the doctor had gone back in his car, but Margaret was dead. Father reproached himself for not finding her the first time, but the doctor said: "It would have been no use. She was stunned when she struck the water and drowned right away."

Over and over Mackay told his story like a phonograph record that wouldn't run down. Even in the middle of the night he started all over again. Mother was too sick to do anything for him and Father was sitting with her.

It was Olga who fed us, and it was Olga who helped the undertakers prepare Margaret for her coffin, putting on her white dress and brushing her curls. She lay in the white coffin like a sleeping angel and we knew she would go through the gate to heaven.

It was Olga who helped the rest of us dress for the funeral as the doctor wouldn't let Mother get out of bed. The church was full of flowers, and after the service was over we went to the cemetery. There we stood close to Father as the white coffin was lowered into the grave; and it wasn't any whiter than Father's face. Then we went home to a table covered with food that people had sent in, but somehow we weren't hungry.

We all missed Margaret, even though we knew she was a

happy angel. It was for ourselves that we grieved. One day while riding the pony I got the idea of asking God to send her back to us. So I clasped my hands and lifted up my voice while my pony trotted along. Then I would pause and listen to see what God would say. There was no answer, and I went on pleading, promising all sorts of things if God would only send her back. God did not appear to me in a cloud or in a burning bush. When I came home I told Father that it wasn't true that God answered prayers. He questioned me and I told him I'd asked God to send Margaret back.

Father looked at me, his eyes sad, his mouth still. "God knows what is best," he said, "and Margaret is one of his little angels. He wants children in his heaven as well as grownups. You cannot have her back — but she can go on living for you if you just remember her each day."

We didn't realize then that Father's grief was greater than ours because he felt that he might have saved her. We just caught glimpses of it when Sweet Violets came and we heard him talking to Mother.

She was standing in front of the window that still had Margaret's finger marks on it, a damp cloth in her hand, and her eyes full of tears. Seeming to forget that I was there with baby Harold, her lips moved, saying:

"'If you knew the little fingers pressed against the windowpane,
Would be cold and stiff tomorrow, never trouble you again,
Would the bright eyes of your darling catch the frown upon your brow?
Would the prints of rosy fingers vex you then as they do now?'"

She was only halfway through when Sweet Violets stepped into the room. He stood and listened to her, then walked over and put his arms around her, motioning me to take Harold out of the room.

I don't know what he said to Mother, but she seemed to be

happier that evening. A few days later I heard them talking.

"It's George David I'm worrying about," she said. "He won't talk about it, but I know he feels that it was his fault. He wishes he had left her at home and, in spite of what the doctor says, he thinks he could have saved her if he'd only found her that first time." She sighed. "I can't seem to reach him."

"No one can just yet," said Sweet Violets. "All you can do is to keep him from thinking that you blame him."

"I – I don't. No more than myself. I shouldn't have let her go with them."

"Now, now," soothed Sweet Violets. "It won't help any to blame yourself, either. God moves in a mysterious way, we know, and perhaps he has a purpose."

I couldn't see what purpose God had for taking Margaret unless it was the reason for Father's suddenly deciding to sell, not only our cattle but our homestead, then go back to Canada to preach.

"Do you really mean it?" cried Mother, when she heard he had written to a church in Saskatchewan.

Father picked up the newspaper, its front page filled with war news. "I – I've had the feeling lately that I should be at home." He shrugged. "Perhaps it is because this war is lasting so long." He looked at his artificial limb and gave a funny laugh. "I can't be a soldier, but there are other ways of helping."

Mother put her arms around him. "I've been feeling that we should go home too. I guess a country is like a family. In times of trouble we want to be together."

Father pulled her onto his lap, and she looked happier than she had since the funeral. "Lang is a nice little town I've been told. You will like it there."

"It – it has a real manse?" asked Mother hesitatingly. "You – won't be farming too?"

"No farm," said Father, "and the manse is right next to the church."

"Oh, George David, I'm so happy. Perhaps our suffering . . ."

Father put his finger on her lips, and she didn't say any more. She put her face against his shoulder, but not before I saw the tears in her eyes.

Somehow that night, after I said my prayers, I again thought of Saul on the road to Damascus. I wondered in a childlike way if God had taken Margaret to show Father the light. Then I forgot it in the excitement of leaving Faith.

There were dinners and teas for Mother and Father and parties for us children. For the last time we played games with our friends: "button, button," "pussy wants a corner"; and even "post office."

When it was my turn to pay the forfeit and I was sent into the dark hall with Don, the boy who had been bitten by the rattlesnake, I feared yet hoped that he would kiss me, as I'd heard they did in the post office game.

To my surprise, Don just sat on the stair steps and talked about Canada. He was envious because he knew, he said, that soon I would be in a land where the Indians still rode to the buffalo hunt and wore skin or fur clothes. Then too he just knew I would see fur-clad Eskimos eating seal oil and picking their teeth with walrus tusks.

"I wish I was going too," he said, and I knew it wasn't me that he was going to miss.

"So do I," I said, but didn't tell him that when we came from Canada we had never seen an Indian or an Eskimo. Perhaps western Canada would be different, I thought hopefully.

At school we saluted the American flag for the last time and sang "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," little realizing that in a few weeks we would be standing before the British flag, just as lustily singing "God Save the King" and "Rule, Britannia."

We all made a farewell visit to Margaret's grave. In doing so we realized that part of us would always be American,

since one of our little Yankees was buried there and we were taking another one, baby Harold, back to Canada with us.

"If you stayed in the States you might be President someday," Sweet Violets told Harold, as he jogged him on his knee.

"So could we," insisted the other boys.

"No, you have to be born in the States to get a chance at being a President," corrected Sweet Violets gently.

The boys looked at Harold with new respect, and we girls were proud. We were taking a possible President of the United States back to Canada, which seemed a good omen.

We were just as proud the following June when our last, but not least, baby — Jean — was born, even though she couldn't be a President. Neither could she take the place of Margaret, but she brought delight to all our hearts in the last year of World War I.

But she was in the future, and we knew nothing about her or the end of the war in September when we packed to travel overland to Canada.

"You can't pack nine people into a two-seater," said Sweet Violets, looking at our new surrey. "So I'll take my buggy and drive along with you."

By coming with us, he softened the tearing up of our roots, grown in the States. Father and Mother had both been right about them. On the farm we had found security from the soil. On the farm and in the towns we had started mental and spiritual roots in our relationships with other people, our sharing of growing-up years, our building of friendships.

"Won't Papa be a farmer any more?" I asked Mother as we put on our hats to begin the overland trip.

Mother left the mirror to go to the window. She looked up at the sky that was a cloudless sea, then she came back to the mirror.

"I'll tell you that, dear, when spring comes again," she said, and I remembered her words before we left Grandma Robinson's home: "*When spring comes and the sap surges*

SIMCOE [illegible] LIBRARY

back into the trees, your papa hears the call of the land. He changes and is happy only when he is working with growing things."

As she straightened her hat there were smiles in her eyes. They were still there when we went downstairs and outside to join Father. He was sitting in the surrey, ready to start the journey back to Canada.

I looked at him, and this time I was remembering his saying, " We'll be nearer God's house on the prairie, Molly."

For an instant I felt a tight feeling where I thought my heart was located. I wondered if we would spend the rest of our lives in manses and never get back to God's prairie. I took another quick look at Mother's happy face and a little sigh escaped me. If that was what she wanted, I would want it too, I decided, but not wholeheartedly.

" All aboard for Canada! " called Father, and in the scramble for seats and the excitement of an overland trip everything else was forgotten.

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

DATE DU

B KNO

For reference
Not To Be Taken
From the Room
Canadiana

SIMCOE PUBLIC LIBRARY

C-9215C
1956